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COMIC BIOGRAPHY

The Aesop Romance is a fictionalized treatment of the life of a supposedly historical character, the fabulist Aesop. Several recensions, or versions, of the novel exist, all going back ultimately to a single work, which in its original form has not come down to us; nor is there any evidence for the identity of its author. In short, the novel became a folkbook.

According to the recension translated here, Aesop was a Phrygian by birth who was mute of speech and deformed in body, a slave of a Greek landowner. As the result of a kindly act, he miraculously gained the ability not only to speak but to speak well. He was sold and soon came into the possession of Xanthus, a philosopher with a number of students on the island of Samos. The slave and the philosopher were at odds from the first. More clever than his master, Aesop mocked his learning, caused him problems, and occasionally rescued him from his troubles. As Aesop became more successful he gained his freedom and presently went on to save the inhabitants of Samos from an attack by Croesus of Lydia and then to win for Nectanabo of Assyria a battle of wits waged with the pharaoh of Egypt. At the height of his fame he visited Delphi, where, after insulting the Delphians as he earlier had insulted their patron deity Apollo, the locals accused him falsely of temple theft and put him to death.

Two early recensions of the novel survive, called by scholars *Vita G* and *Vita W.* Although additions, deletions, and other modifications characterize both branches of the tradition, *Vita G* generally remains closer to the original. It is also much the longer of the two (G runs to forty-three pages and W to twenty-seven pages in Perry's edition of the Greek text)[1] and is written in a more popular language. The two recensions fortunately have a complementary relationship to some extent in that matter missing from one can sometimes be supplied from the other, but ultimately they are not reconcilable and, like different performances of a folktale or of an oral epic, must each be accepted as valid expressions of the story in their own right. In addition a half-dozen or so papyrus fragments of the novel are known, some agreeing with these recensions, some not, and a Byzantine version, the *Vita Accursiana,* also exists. The present translation is based upon *Vita G* with supplements in brackets taken from *Vita W.*

We can catch a glimpse of our author at work, at least to the extent of discerning some of materials he drew upon to fashion his story. First were old traditions about Aesop. No accounts of Aesop exist from his own period, the sixth century B.C., but details about him are found in Greek authors such as Herodotus from the fifth century B.C. onward. For them Aesop was variously the inventor of fable telling, the person who brought to Greece the practice of employing fables, the inventor of certain fables, or a man who was remarkable for his use of fables.[2] In any case Aesop was renowned for having recounted simple but rhetorically effective tales, narratives that commented metaphorically on an issue at hand. He was said to be a Phrygian or sometimes a Thracian, a slave of a certain Greek named Iadmon or Xanthus and a co-slave of the famous courtesan Rhodopis. Having obtained his freedom he met his death in Delphi after he had insulted the local folk, for the Delphians secretly planted a sacred cup in his baggage, accused him of stealing it from a temple, and executed him. For this unjust act the Delphians were punished by the gods.[3] No one knows how much of this information, if any, accurately reflects the life of an historical person, but the traditions, however they came into being and however they were transmitted, manifestly formed one of the important sources used by the author of *The Aesop Romance,* for the Aesop of the novel agrees in many ways with the Aesop of tradition.

Into this framework the author fits many events that were not, so far as we know, part of the biographical tradition. Some of the episodes are recognizable as international folktales or folk-narrative structures that are adapted here to Aesop. For example, when the protagonist of a folktale sets out into the world, he or she often encounters a stranger who provides exactly the magical agent that will be required for the accomplishment of the task that lies ahead. Usually the stranger asks the hero for something, the latter responds in a kindly way, and the stranger in turn provides the hero with the sine qua non for future success. This narrative structure is known to folklorists as a *donor sequence.*[4] In *The Aesop Romance* it has clearly inspired an episode that occurs early in the novel (chaps. 4–8). As Aesop was working in the field, a stranger who had lost her way approached him and asked him to show her the road to the city. He first led the woman to a grove, where he shared his meal with her, then brought her to a spring of water and finally escorted her to the road she sought. The grateful traveler, who proved to be a priestess of Isis, prayed to the goddess to reward her benefactor, so that as Aesop took his afternoon nap, Isis and the nine Muses granted him speech and the ability to devise tales. It was this magic gift that, fairytale-like, enabled Aesop to enjoy all the success that he thereafter had.

Comic ideas and routines that were current in the author's day are another kind of raw material that he drew upon, such as the routine in which Aesop interprets the same abbreviation in three different ways (chaps. 78–80). One day Aesop and Xanthus come upon a cryptic inscription: Α Β Δ Ο Ε Θ Χ. Aesop interprets it to mean: "Step off paces four, dig, you will find a treasure of gold." In the Greek the seven words of Aesop's sentence begin with the seven letters of the Greek inscription. Acting upon this interpretation, Aesop takes four steps, digs a hole, and finds the promised treasure. When Xanthus proves unwilling to share the treasure with its finder, Aesop then declares that the inscription means: "Return to King Dionysius what you find here, a treasure of gold." The seven Greek words in this sentence also begin with the same seven letters. When Xanthus finally agrees to share the treasure, Aesop confirms the correctness of this welcome plan by means of a third reading: "Take up, go off, divide what you find here, a treasure of gold." The comic misinterpretation of an abbreviation, and in particular the interpretation of a single abbreviation in several different ways, is attested elsewhere, for Cicero illustrates the device in a discussion of humor. When Scaurus (he says) was prosecuting Rutilius for corrupt practices in electioneering, he pointed to the letters A.F.P.R., which were found in Rutilius's accounts, saying that they stood for "Acting for Publius Rutilius." Rutilius objected that they meant rather "Allocated formerly, posted recently." Then a third man called out that neither interpretation was correct, claiming that the true meaning was "Aemilius filched; punish Rutilius."[5]

The author's single most extensive borrowing is from a Near Eastern literary composition, the *Ahikar Romance,* which had circulated internationally in various languages from at least the fifth century B.C.[6] The narrative recounts the adventures of the wise Ahikar, vizier to the Assyrian king. Childless and desiring an heir, Ahikar adopted his sister's son Nadan, taught him his craft, and instructed him in wisdom. But Ahikar's ungrateful nephew falsely represented Ahikar to the king as being a traitor. Ahikar's execution was ordered, but the kindly executioner only pretended to do his job, concealing Ahikar in a place of safety. Subsequently the Assyrian monarch was challenged by the king of Egypt, who bade him accomplish several seemingly impossible tasks or, if he was unable to do so, pay tribute to the Egyptian monarch. Since the king of Assyria now longed again for the services of wise Ahikar, the executioner revealed that the sage was in fact still alive. After his name was cleared and Nadan's treachery shown, Ahikar got the better of the Egyptian king.

Ahikar again instructed Nadan in wisdom, and the youth died from shame. This lively Oriental story is transferred with little change from the Assyrian sage Ahikar to the Phrygian sage Aesop (chaps. 101–123).

In the view of most critics, the author of the *Aesop Romance* has assembled these materials artlessly into a patchwork narrative unified by little more than the figure of Aesop. Episodes are tacked loosely onto one another with little regard for transition, consistency of character and action, or their place in the composition as a whole. In other words, the episodes constitute a conglomerate, existing to provide abundant reading matter rather than to play a role in a tightly organized work of art. Niklas Holzberg has challenged this view, arguing that the novel is rather an elaborately structured work reflecting definite principles of composition, including the disposition of individual episodes.[7] Whether one perceives the work as constructed casually or intricately, one must grant that it is not artless, for the author is a fine and effective raconteur.

Running thematically through the life from beginning to end is a confrontation of low culture and high culture, expressed in such ways as a tension between slave and master, vulgarity and refinement, native wit and Greek philosophy, commoner and king, Isis/Muses/Marsyas and Apollo. In return for his kindly spirit the goddess Isis and the Muses enhance Aesop's native intelligence by granting him also speech and artistry. Thus equipped he gradually rises higher and higher in the world, rescuing progressively more important persons (the philosopher Xanthus, the Samians, the ruler of Assyria) from grave threats, until in the end he faces the problem of rescuing only himself, which he is unable to do.[8] While Isis is on his side, Apollo, representing Greek aristocratic culture, is not. Aesop offends this deity when he erects a shrine to the Muses and places in it a statue of their mother Mnemosyne rather than of their leader Apollo, causing the god to become angry with him (chap. 100), and the god is still wroth when subsequently the sage comes to Delphi, Apollo's special territory, where Apollo's people, the Delphians, conspire to execute him (chap. 127).[9] Aesop loses in the end to overwhelming odds, but for most of the biography he is a man of lowly origins enjoying a superiority of wit to the powerful persons of the world. The fantasy is certainly akin to that of the lowly peasant lad who by means of wit, luck, and a good heart wins the princess and half the kingdom.

Hero and anti-hero, Aesop is multifaceted. In his ugliness and sassiness, as a lowly speaker of unpleasant truths, he is reminiscent of figures such as the deformed and outspoken Thersites in Homer's *Iliad* (2.211–277).[10] A clever slave, he is a successor to the stock character of the clever slave in ancient comedy and a predecessor of the clever slave of modern folktales.[11] In his role as narrator of fables and solver of baffling problems he is a sage.

Composed around the second century A.D., the *Aesop Romance* appears to be the work of a man of modest education, perhaps a Greek-speaking Egyptian. In many manuscripts the novel is followed by an anthology of Aesopic fables, and it is not known whether the combination is original or secondary.[12] Since the novel (chap. 100) represents Aesop as writing down his fables and depositing them in the library of King Croesus, perhaps we are supposed to view the accompanying compilation of fables as being a copy of that very book. But the compilation itself makes no such claim and ancient fable collections regularly represent their contents only as tales in the manner of Aesop.

The Aesop Romance has enjoyed widespread popularity in the past and deserves to be better known in the present. The Byzantine recension spawned Bulgarian, Serbian, and Turkish versions.[13] Two Latin renderings are known, one being a version of *Vita W* made by the Italian humanist Rinuccio da Castiglione in 1448. Heinrich Steinhöwel presently published Rinuccio's translation along with a German version in his collection of the fables of Aesop (1476–77), a famous work that became one of the best sellers among early printed books. It was translated into many other languages, among them Castilian, a rendering that was the most widely read book in Spain for at least two hundred years and probably influenced the early picaresque novel.[14]

NOTES

1. Perry 1952.

2. The ancient testimonia about Aesop are collected in Perry 1952:211–229.

3. The deception of the item planted in the visitor's luggage is employed also by the Hebrew Joseph as a ruse for the detention of his brothers in Egypt (Genesis 44) and so must have been an international story motif.

4. See Propp 1968:39–50 and Hansen 1997a:458–459.

5. Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.69.280; see also 2.59.240. I am indebted in my rendering of the Ciceronean anecdote to E. W. Sutton in his translation of *De Oratore* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1942), 1:411–413, which manages to reproduce the Latin abbreviations in English. Notice also the acronym Α Β Γ Δ Ε that Alexander the Great allegedly inscribed upon his founding of Alexandria (*Alexander Romance* 1.32).

6. See Conybeare et al. 1913 and Lindenberger 1985.

7. Holzberg 1992:33–75; 1993a; 1996. Steps in this direction are already evident in Holbek 1962 2:21–23.

8. Holzberg 1993a:7.

9. Aesop's slight to Apollo and the deity's revenge appear only in *Vita G*, in which Aesop erects a shrine to the Muses, placing an image in their midst. In Perry's text, upon which Lloyd Daly's translation is based, it is "Mnemosyne, not Apollo," whereas in the recent critical edition by Papathomopoulos (1990) it is "memorial of himself, not Apollo." Although the latter reading is closer to the

received text and perhaps gains support from the fact that presently Nectanabo also honors both Aesop and the Muses with a golden statue (chap. 123), both readings rest upon emendations of the Greek manuscript. The difference is not without significance, but the essential point in both is that Aesop slights Apollo by neglecting him.

10. See Winkler 1985:276–291, who draws in part upon Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

11. The African American tales concerning John and Old Marster are a striking counterpart in modern tradition to the contentious and wily relationship of Aesop and Xanthus in the novel. For modern texts, see Dorson 1967:124–171 and Abrahams 1985: 263–295.

12. *Vita G* accompanies the fable compilation known as the *Collectio Augustana,* an excerpt from which is given in this anthology (selection 8).

13. Papathomopoulos 1990:27.

14. Keller and Keating 1993:4. On the *Aesop Romance* and the Spanish picaresque novel, see Holzberg 1993a:1–2.

LITERATURE

Adrados 1979–1987, 1:661–697. Holbek 1962, 2:17–38. Holzberg 1992, 1993a, 1996. Jedrkiewicz 1989:41–215. La Penna 1962. Papathomopoulos 1990. Perry 1981 [1936], 1952. Winkler 1985:276–291. Zeitz 1936.

ANONYMOUS

The Aesop Romance

(THE BOOK OF XANTHUS THE PHILOSOPHER AND AESOP HIS SLAVE OR THE CAREER OF AESOP)

translated by Lloyd W. Daly

Notes accompanying the translation are by the translator

(1) The fabulist Aesop, the great benefactor of mankind, was by chance a slave but by origin a Phrygian of Phrygia, of loathsome aspect, worthless as a servant, potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped—a portentous monstrosity. In addition to this he had a defect more serious than his unsighltiness in being speechless, for he was dumb and could not talk.

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(2) His master, finding him silent under all circumstances and unsuited for service in the city, sent him to the country [to dig in one of his fields. Once when he went to visit his farm, a farm hand who had gathered some very fine figs brought them to Aesop's master and said, "Here, master, take this early harvest of your fruit."

The master was pleased and said, "Bless me, these are fine figs." And he said to his servant, "Agathopous, take these and keep them for me. After I have a bath and dinner, serve me the fruit."

About that time Aesop happened to quit work and came in for his daily meal. But Agathopous, who had taken the figs, began to feel hungry and ate one or two of them. *He was strongly tempted to eat all of them but did not quite dare.*] One of his fellow slaves, seeing his affliction, said to him, "Friend slave, I know you have something on your mind. You want to eat those figs."

"Yes, by Zeus, I do," said he, "but how do you know?"

He said, "I know the thought in your heart from the look on your face. Now, I'll give you an idea how the two of us can eat them."

"Well, you haven't given me a very good idea," said he, "for when the master looks for his figs and we can't produce them, what's going to happen?"

He said, "Tell him that Aesop found the storeroom door conveniently open, got in, and ate the figs. Since Aesop can't talk, he'll get a beating, and you'll get what you want."

So saying, they sat down and started to eat the figs. As they were eating they said, "Poor Aesop. He's really a sad sack, good for nothing but whipping. Let's make this bargain once and for all: Whatever gets broken or lost or spilled we'll say that Aesop did it, and we'll be unbeatable." And so they ate the figs.

(3) At the appointed hour the master came from his bath and dinner with his mouth all set for the figs. He said, "Agathopous, give me the figs." The master, seeing that he was cheated for all his pains and learning that Aesop had eaten the figs, said, "Somebody call Aesop." He was called, and when he came, the master said to him, "You damned scoundrel, do you have so little respect for me that you would go to the storeroom and eat the figs that were set aside for me?" Aesop heard but couldn't talk because of the impediment in his speech, and seeing his accusers face to face, knowing he would get a beating, he threw himself at his master's knees and begged him to wait a bit. When the master acceded, he took a pitcher which he saw at hand and by gestures asked for some warm water. Then, putting a basin before him, he drank the water, put his fingers into his throat, retched, and threw up the water he had drunk. He hadn't eaten a thing. Then having proven his point through his resourcefulness, he asked that his fellow slaves do the same thing so that they might find out who it was that had eaten the figs. The

master was pleased with this idea and ordered the others to drink and vomit.

The other slaves said to themselves, "What shall we do, Hermas? Let's drink and not put our fingers down our throat but only in our cheek." But as soon as they drank the warm water, the figs, now mixed with bile, rose up, and they no sooner removed their fingers than out came the figs.

The master said, "Look how you've lied against a man who can't speak. Strip them." They got their beating and learned a good lesson to the effect that when you scheme up trouble for someone else, the first thing you know, you are bringing the trouble on yourself.

(4) They paid the penalty for the wrong they had done against a man who couldn't speak. [On the following day the master returned to the] city. As Aesop was digging in the field, a priestess of Isis happened to stray from the highway and came across the field where he was digging. Seeing him toiling away at his work and not knowing his misfortune she said, "Good man, if you have any pity for mortal souls, show me the road to the city, for I have lost my way."

When Aesop turned around and saw a woman wearing the raiment of a goddess, being a pious man, he bowed down to her and began to make signs with his head as much as to say, "Why have you left the highway and come to the farm?"

Seeing that he could hear but could not speak, she began to gesture and said to him, "I am a stranger in these parts and a priestess, as you see, of Isis. I beg of you to show me the way, for I am lost."

Aesop picked up the mattock with which he was digging, and taking her by the hand, he led her to a grove and put before her bread and olives from his napkin and cut wild greens and brought them to her. He pressed her to share his food, and she did. Then he took her to a spring of water and indicated that she should partake of it, too. When she had partaken of his food and drink, she offered a prayer for the finest rewards for Aesop. Then again she asked him by signs to complete his kindness by showing her the way. He took her to the highway by which the wagons traveled, and when he had pointed it out, he went back and put his mind to his work.

(5) But the priestess of Isis, having regained the road and reflecting on Aesop's friendliness, raised her hands to heaven and said, "Oh, crown of the whole world, Isis of many names, have pity on this workman, who suffers and is pious, for the piety he has shown, not to me, oh mistress, but to your appearance. And if you are unwilling to repay this man with a livelihood of many talents for what the other gods have taken from him, at least grant him the power of speech, for you have the power to bring back to light those things which have fallen into darkness." And

when the priestess had made this prayer, her mistress harkened, for word of piety quickly reaches the ears of the gods.

(6) It was very hot, and Aesop said to himself, "The overseer allows me two hours for rest. I'll sleep these hours while it's hot." He picked out a spot on the farm that was green and peaceful, a wooded, shady place where all kinds of flowers bloomed amid the green grass and where a little stream wandered among the neighboring trees. There Aesop threw his mattock on the ground, lay down on the grass and, putting his napkin and his sheepskin under his head, went to sleep. The stream whispered and, as a gentle zephyr blew, the leaves of the trees around about were stirred and exhaled a sweet and soothing breath. There was much humming of cicadas from the branches, and the song of birds of many kinds and many haunts was to be heard. There the nightingale prolonged her plaintive song, and the branches of the olive murmured musically in a sympathetic refrain. On the slenderest branch of a pine-tree the stirring of the breeze mocked the blackbird's call. And mingling with it all in harmony, Echo, the imitator of voices, uttered her answering cries. The combined sound of all these was soothing to hear and Aesop, lulled by it, drifted off into a pleasant slumber.

(7) Thereupon the goddess, our lady Isis, appeared along with the nine Muses and said, "My daughters, you see here a man who may be ill-favored in appearance but who rises above all criticism in his piety. It was he who guided my servant on her way when she was lost, and I am here with you to recompense him. I restore his voice, and do you bestow upon his voice most excellent speech." So saying, Isis herself removed from his tongue the impediment which prevented his speaking and persuaded the Muses as well to confer on him each something of her own endowment. They conferred on him the power to devise stories and the ability to conceive and elaborate tales in Greek. With a prayer that he might achieve fame the goddess went her way, and the Muses, when each had conferred her own gift, ascended to Mount Helicon.

(8) When Aesop had his sleep out, he awoke and said, "Ah! I've had a pleasant nap." And naming over things he saw—mattock, pouch, sheepskin, napkin, ox, ass, sheep—he said, "By the Muses! I speak! Where have I gotten the power of speech? *Where?* Surely it is in return for my piety toward the priestess of Isis, and piety is a good thing. I look, then, to realize good hopes from the gods."

(9) Rejoicing and taking up his mattock, he began to dig again. But the overseer of the fields came among the workers and thrashed one of Aesop's fellows with his stick. Aesop could no longer restrain himself but said, "My good man, why do you so cruelly mistreat and mercilessly beat a man who has done no wrong, though you yourself take every occasion to do wrong and are beaten by no one?"

Zenas said to himself, "What's this? Aesop is speaking! By the gods, he no sooner begins to speak than he lashes right out at me, the one who talks to him and gives him his orders. If I don't find some pretext to accuse him, he is in a position to have me removed from my stewardship, for even while he was dumb, he would make signs at me as much as to say, 'If my master comes, I'll have you removed from your stewardship. I'll accuse you by signs.' If he would lay his charges by signs, he will surely be all the more persuasive now that he is talking. So I had better forestall him."

(10) Then he mounted his horse and rode posthaste to the city. Arrived at his master's house, he sprang from the horse, and fastening the rein to the ring at the entrance, he went into the house, and when he found his master, he said, "Master—"

But the master said, "Zenas, why are you so excited?"

And Zenas said, "A monstrous thing has happened on your estate."

And he said, "A tree hasn't borne fruit out of season, has it, or an animal given birth to something that looks like a human?"

Zenas said, "No, sir."

He said, "What is it that you think is monstrous, then? Just tell me the truth."

And Zenas said, "That good-for-nothing Aesop whom you sent out to dig in the field, the potbellied—"

The master said, "What has he given birth to?"

"Nothing like that," said he, "but dumb as he is, he has spoken."

The master said, "Don't expect any thanks. Do you think this is a monstrosity?"

Zenas said, "Yes, I certainly do."

The master said, "Why? If the gods in their anger at a man deprived him of speech for a time, and now, being reconciled, have given it to him again, as is the case, do you think that monstrous?"

Zenas said, "Yes, sir. For now that he has begun to speak, everything he says is unnatural; he says the most monstrously slanderous things against me and against you, too, things my ears won't bear hearing."

(11) The master was shaken by this and said to Zenas, "Go sell him."

Zenas said, "Are you joking, master? Don't you know how unsightly he is? Who will want to buy him and have a baboon instead of a man?"

The master said, "Well then, go give him to someone. And if no one wants to take him, beat him to death."

Once Zenas had this absolute authority over Aesop, he jumped on his horse again and went back to the estate. He said to himself, "The master has given me absolute authority over Aesop: to sell him, to give him away, to kill him. What harm has he done me that I should kill him? I'll sell him." Thus all the favors granted Aesop by the gods served him in good stead.

(12) A slave dealer happened to be going by horseback from the

country to the city. Wishing to lighten his slaves' burdens, he had been looking for animals to hire in the country, but since he had found none, he was on his way back to the city. Zenas knew the man, and when he met him, he greeted him, saying, "Greetings, merchant Ophelion."

And he responded, "Greetings, farmer Zenas."

And Ophelion said to him, "Zenas, you don't have any animals to hire or sell, do you?"

And Zenas said, "No, by Zeus, I don't, but I do have a male slave to sell cheap if you want him."

And the dealer, who made his living at just this, said, "You ask me, a slave dealer, if I want to buy a slave cheap?"

Zenas said, "Come over to this next property," (13) and leading him to the field he said, "One of you slaves go out to where they're working and call Aesop."

So one of the slaves went and, finding Aesop digging, said to him, "Aesop, drop your mattock and come along, the master is calling for you."

And Aesop said, "What master? My natural master or the steward? Tell me clearly and unequivocally if you mean 'the steward' and not 'the master'; for the steward is a slave and is himself consigned to the yoke of servitude."

"Well," said the slave to himself, "how he does throw words around. But what's to become of him? Ever since he found his tongue, he's been flying high."

Aesop threw his mattock down and said, "What a wearisome thing it is being a slave to a slave! What's more, it must be evil in the sight of the gods. 'Aesop, lay the table. Aesop, heat the bath. Aesop, feed the livestock.' Anything that's unpleasant or tiresome or painful or menial, that's what Aesop is ordered to do. So I have the power of speech the gods gave me, don't I? The master will come, and I'll be right there to accuse this fellow and do him out of his stewardship. But now I must knuckle under. So lead on, my slave friend."

They went back, and the slave said, "Sir, here's Aesop."

Zenas said, "Look him over, mister dealer."

(14) As the slave dealer turned to Aesop and saw what a piece of human garbage he appeared to be, he said, "This must be the trumpeter in the battle of the cranes. Is he a turnip or a man? If he didn't have a voice, I would have said he was a pot or a jar for food or a goose egg. Zenas, I think you've treated me pretty shabbily. I could have been home already. But no, you had to drag me off as though you had something worthwhile to sell instead of this refuse." So saying, he started away.

(15) As he went, Aesop caught him by the tail of his cloak and said, "Listen."

But the merchant said, "Let me go. I wish you no luck. Why do you call me back?"

Aesop said, "Why did you come here?"

And he replied, "On account of you. To buy you."

"Well, then," said Aesop, "why don't you buy me?"

The merchant said, "Don't bother me. I don't want to buy you."

Aesop: "Buy me, sir, and by Isis, I'll be very useful to you."

Slave dealer: "And how can you be useful to me that I should change my mind and buy you?"

Aesop: "Don't you have any undisciplined fellows in your slave market who are always asking for food?"

Slave dealer: "Yes."

Aesop: "Buy me and make me their trainer. They'll be afraid of my ugly face and will stop acting so unruly."

Slave dealer: "A fine idea, by your dubious origin!" And turning to Zenas, the dealer said, "How much do you want for this sad specimen?"

"Give me three obols," said Zenas.

Slave dealer: "No fooling, how much?"

Zenas: "Give me whatever you will." The slave dealer offered a trifle and bought him.

(16) When he returned to the city, he took him into his slave market. Two boys who were in the care of their mother no sooner saw Aesop than they began to howl and hid their eyes. Aesop said to the slave dealer, "There's your proof of what I said. You've bought yourself a ready relief from unruly boys."

The slave dealer laughed and said to him, "There's the dining room where your fellow slaves are eating. Go in and say hello to them."

So Aesop went in and saw some very handsome boys, a picked lot, all regular Dionysuses and Apollos. He greeted them, saying, "Hello, my little slave friends." They all shouted back in unison.

Aesop: "Fellow slaves, I am one of you even though I am repulsive."

The slaves said to themselves, "That he is, by Nemesis. What's come over the master to buy such an ugly specimen?"

One said, "Do you know why he bought him?"

Another said, "Why?"

"To use him as a horror to protect the market from the evil eye."

(17) Then the slave dealer came in and said to the slaves, "Boys, make the most of your luck. As I hope to keep you well, I couldn't find any baggage animals either to hire or to buy. You'll have to divide the gear among you, for tomorrow we're going over into Asia."

So then they paired off and started to divide the gear up among them. But Aesop fell on his knees before them all and said, "Please, my fellow slaves, since I am newly bought and not strong, let me have the light baggage to carry."

They said, "Don't carry anything at all."

But Aesop said, "I'm ashamed to let the master see me not helping when all my fellow slaves are hard at work."

The other slaves said to themselves, "Why does he have to show off? Carry whatever you like."

(18) Aesop looked around and saw what gear the slave dealer had for the trip: a chest, reed mats, bags full of equipment, bedding, jars, baskets. Spying a basket full of bread which four men were going to carry, Aesop said, "Men, just put this basket on my shoulders."

And the slaves said to themselves, "We've never seen a worse fool than this fellow. He begged to carry the lightest load of all, and he's chosen the heaviest of all."

Another said, "He's no fool; he's starved and wants to get his hands on the bread so he can eat more than the rest. Let's give him the basket." They all gathered around and loaded the basket on him. He started out carrying the basket as though he were an Atlas, but a very shaky one.

When the slave dealer saw him, he was astonished and said, "Just see how ready that Aesop is to work and how he sets an example for the others to bear their toil in good spirit. I've already saved his price. That's a load for a mule."

(19) The others laughed at him as they paired off to pick up their burdens, for as he went out onto the road, he taught his basket to walk. When he came to a rise, he would tip the basket over and pull with his teeth until he got to the top, then on the way down he would have easy going, for he would let the basket go while he got on top and rode along with it.

After a wearisome time they came to an inn, and the slave dealer said, "Aesop, give a loaf of bread to each pair." There were enough slaves so that when he gave them their ration, the basket was half empty. They took up their burdens and started on the way again, but Aesop's step was now brisk. They came to another inn; once more he gave them bread, and the basket was emptied. Now he tossed the basket on his shoulder and ran ahead of everyone.

The slaves said to themselves, "Who is this running ahead? Is it one of us or a stranger?"

Another: "I don't know, but I think it's the newcomer, the weakling who took the basket that was too much for a mule to carry."

Another: "You underestimate the little fellow's wit."

Another: "These little fellows who are short on looks are long on brains. He asked to carry the bread that would be used up right away, but we carry the firewood and bedding and brassware, stuff that can't be used up."

Another: "Bah, the fellow ought to be crucified."

(20) They finished their trip and came to Ephesus. There the merchant

made a profitable deal of selling the slaves, but he had three left on his hands, two young bucks, one an elementary teacher and other a musician, plus Aesop. The two of them didn't bring a fair price and neither did Aesop. Then a friend of the slave dealer said, "If you want to get a price for your slaves, go over to the island of Samos; there's plenty of money there, for Xanthus the philosopher has his school there, and many come over from Asia and from Greece to study with him. Someone will buy the teacher to get a partner to share the work on his studies. Someone else will buy the musician—some playboy—to add to his good times with his young friends. Someone with whom the gods are angry will even buy this one and make him a butler or a doorman or a cook." Persuaded by his friend's advice, the merchant boarded a small vessel with his slaves and went over to Samos. There he landed, took a lodging, and dressed his slaves up for sale. (21) He dressed the musician, who was good-looking, in a white robe, put light shoes on him, combed his hair, gave him a scarf for his shoulders, and put him on the selling block. But since the teacher had spindly legs, he put a long robe and high boots on him so that the length of the robe and the protection of the boots would hide his ugly shanks, and then, when he had combed his hair and given him a scarf, he put him on the selling block. But he couldn't cover up or prettify Aesop, since he was a completely misshapen pot, and so he dressed him in a sackcloth robe, tied a strip of material around his middle, and stood him between the two handsome slaves. When the auctioneer began to announce the sale, many noticed them and said, "Bah, these fellows look fine enough, but where did this awful thing come from? He spoils their appearance, too. Take him away." Though many made cutting remarks, Aesop stood fast and didn't turn a hair.

(22) Xanthus' wife happened to pass the place, riding in a litter, and heard the auctioneer. When she got home, she went into the house, found her husband, and said, "Husband, we don't have many male slaves, and most of the time you are served by my maids. Fortunately, there are some slaves on sale. Now, you go buy me a nice slave for our family."

Xanthus said, "I will," and went out. First he met his students, and then, after they had spent some time in discussion, he left the hall, and taking the students with him, went to the market. (23) Seeing from a distance the two handsome slaves and the ugly one, he admired the slave dealer's acumen and exclaimed, "Bravo! Well done, by Hera. An acute and philosophical, indeed a marvelous, a perfect merchant!"

The students: "What are you praising, professor? What is worthy of your admiration? Let us in on it, too. Don't begrudge us a share of the beautiful."

Xanthus said, "Gentlemen and scholars, you must not think that philosophy consists only in what can be put in words but also in acts. Indeed, unspoken philosophy often surpasses that which is expressed in words. You can observe this in the case of dancers, how by the movement of their hands the continued motions themselves express an unspoken philosophy. You see, this man had two handsome boys and one ugly one. He put the ugly one between the handsome ones in order that his ugliness should make their beauty noticeable, for if the ugliness were not set in contrast to that which is superior to it, the appearance of the handsome ones would not have been put to the test."

The students: "You are marvelous, professor. How fine of you to perceive so clearly his purpose!"

Xanthus: "Very well, but come along, and let's buy one of these slaves, for I need a servant." (24) He stepped in front of the first boy and said, "Where do you come from?"

He replied, "I'm a Cappadocian."

"What's your name?"

"Liguris."

Xanthus said, "What do you know how to do?"

He said, "I know how to do everything."

Aesop stood there and burst into laughter. When the students saw him suddenly taken with a fit of laughter, [his face all drawn and contorted so that only his teeth showed, they thought they were seeing some unearthly portent. They said to one another, "Do you suppose this is a turnip with teeth?"

Another said, "What did he see to laugh at?"

Another spoke up, "He doesn't laugh, he shudders. But let's see what he has to say." He went up behind him, pulled at his robe, and said, "What were you laughing at, wise guy?"

Aesop turned around and said to him, "Go away, you silly ass." The student was nonplused at this retort and retreated.

Xanthus said to the merchant, "How much for this musician?"

He said, "A thousand denarii."

When he heard this high price, he went over to the other one and said, "Where do you come from?"

He said, "I'm a Lydian."

"And what's your name?"

He said, "Philocalus."

Xanthus said, "What do you know how to do?"

The boy said, "Everything."

Again Aesop burst out laughing, and when the students saw this, they said, "Why does he laugh at everything?"

One said, "If I want to be called a silly ass again, I'll ask him once more."

Xanthus said to the merchant, "How much will you sell the teacher for?"

He said, "Three thousand denarii."

When Xanthus heard this, he lost interest and turned to go away. But the students said, "Professor, didn't you like the slaves?"

"Yes," he said, "but it's a principle with me not to buy high-priced slaves but to be served by cheap ones."

One of the students said, "If you're determined not to pay high prices, buy the unsightly fellow. He'll serve you just as well, and we'll chip in to pay the price."

He said, "It would be ridiculous for you to pay the price and for me to buy the slave, and anyhow my wife is fussy and won't stand for having an ugly slave."

The students said, "Professor, most of your teachings are to the effect that one shouldn't pay attention to a woman."

(25) Xanthus said,] "Well, let me see if he knows anything. I don't want you to lose your money on a favor that's of no use." So Xanthus went back to Aesop and said, "Good day to you."

Aesop: "And is there anything wrong with my day?"

The students: "Fair enough, by the Muses. What was wrong with his day?" They were impressed with his apt retort.

And Xanthus said, "Where do you come from?"

Aesop: "From the flesh."

Xanthus: "That's not what I mean. Where were you born?"

Aesop: "In my mother's belly."

Xanthus: "The devil take him. That's not what I'm asking you, but in what place were you born?"

Aesop: "My mother didn't tell me whether it was in the bedroom or the dining room."

Xanthus said, "Tell me what you are by nationality."

Aesop: "A Phrygian."

Xanthus: "What do you know how to do?"

Aesop: "Nothing at all."

Xanthus: "Why do you say nothing?"

Aesop: "Because the other two boys know everything there is."

The students: "Hey! He's wonderful. These fellows' answers were no good. No man alive knows everything. That's why he said he knew nothing. That's why he laughed."

(26) Xanthus: "Do you want me to buy you?"

Aesop: "What do you mean? Do you think that you already own me as an adviser so that you can get advice from me about myself? If you want to buy me, buy me. If you don't, move on. I don't care what you do. The man who's selling me doesn't have nets to drag in unwilling customers, and no one is putting you under bond to buy me. You're entirely free to make your own choice. If you want to take me, pay the price. Undo your pursestrings. If you don't want to, don't poke fun at me."

Xanthus: "What makes you so talkative?"

Aesop: "Talking birds sell for a high price."

The students: "By Hera, this Aesop has done a neat job of muzzling the professor."

Xanthus: "I want to buy you, but—you won't run away, will you?"

Aesop: "If I intend to, I won't take you on as an adviser, as you are me. But whom does my running away depend on, you or me?"

Xanthus: "On you, obviously."

Aesop: "No, on you."

Xanthus: "Why on me?"

Aesop: "If you are good to your slaves, no one is going to run away from what is good to what is bad and condemn himself to vagrancy with the prospect of hunger and fear to face. But if you are bad to your slaves, I won't stay with you for an hour, not even for a half-hour or a minute."

Xanthus: *(aside)* "This fellow is trying to avoid having something happen to him." *(To Aesop)* "All that you say is understandable in a man, but *you* are deformed."

Aesop: "Don't look at my appearance, but examine my soul."

Xanthus: "What is appearance?"

Aesop: "It's like what often happens when we go to a wine shop to buy wine. The jars we see are ugly, but the wine tastes good."

(27) Xanthus complimented him on his pat answers and went over to the merchant. "How much," he asked, "are you selling this one for?"

The merchant: "Are you laughing at my business?"

Xanthus: "How so?"

The merchant: "Well, you've passed up these valuable slaves and gone on to this repulsive piece of human property. Buy one of them and take this one as a gift."

Xanthus: "Still, how much do you want for him?"

The merchant: "I bought him for sixty denarii, and he's cost me fifteen in expenses. Pay me what he has cost."

When the tax collectors heard that a sale of slaves had been made, they came over and wanted to know who was the seller and who was the buyer. Xanthus hesitated to say, "I bought a slave for seventy-five denarii," and the merchant was embarrassed. When they didn't say anything, Aesop bawled out, "I was sold; here's the seller, and there's the buyer. If they have nothing to say, it's plain I'm a free man."

Xanthus said: "I bought the slave for seventy-five denarii."

The tax collectors laughed, remitted the tax on Aesop to Xanthus and his students, bade them goodbye, and went away.

(28) Aesop went along with Xanthus. It was the hottest part of the day with the sun directly overhead, and since the road was deserted because of the heat, Xanthus lifted up his robe and began to urinate as he walked along. Aesop was furious when he saw this, took hold of the tail

of his master's robe and, giving it a jerk, said "Sell me, since you won't stand for my running away."

Xanthus: "Aesop, what's the matter with you?"

Aesop: "Sell me. I can't be your slave."

Xanthus: "Surely one of those people who go around upsetting decent households with their slander has prejudiced you. Someone has come to you and spoken ill of me, saying that I mistreat my slaves or beat them or am a drunkard or am irritable or irascible. Pay no attention to slander. 'Slander, pleasant to hear, provokes to anger without cause.' "

Aesop: "It was your excretion that slandered you, Xanthus. For when you, the master, who have no reason to stand in dread of anyone for fear that when you come home you may get a taste of beating or may face confinement or some worse form of punishment, but are master of your own fate—when you can't even take a little time off for the physical necessities, but urinate while you walk, what can I, a slave, do after all, when I'm sent on an errand, but defecate on the fly?"

Xanthus: "Is that what was bothering you?"

Aesop: "It certainly was."

Xanthus: "I urinated as I walked along to avoid three unpleasant consequences."

Aesop: "What are they?"

Xanthus: "The heat of the earth, the acrid smell of the urine, and the burning of the sun."

Aesop: "How's that?"

Xanthus: "You see that the sun is directly overhead and has scorched the earth with its heat, and when I stand still to urinate, the hot ground burns my feet, the acrid smell of the urine invades my nostrils, and the sun burns my head. It was because I wanted to avoid these three consequences that I urinated as I walked along."

Aesop: "You've convinced me. A very clear rationalization. Walk on."

Xanthus: "Well, I didn't realize I had bought myself a master."

(29) When they came to the house, Xanthus said to him, "Aesop, my wife is fussy. You wait here at the door until I break the news to her so that she won't take one quick look at your deformity and then ask for her dowry and leave me."

Aesop: "If you're under your wife's thumb, go and get it over with."

So Xanthus went in and said, "My dear, you no longer have cause to drum at me and say that I'm waited on by your maids. You see I've bought myself a manservant."

Xanthus' wife: "Thank you, lady Aphrodite! Great you are, and the dreams you send are true. *(To Xanthus)* As soon as I went to sleep, I had a dream in which you bought a perfectly beautiful slave and gave him to me for a gift."

Xanthus: "Just wait, my dear, and you shall see such beauty as you've never seen before. I might almost say that you shall see an Apollo or an Endymion or a Ganymede."

(30) The maids were delighted, and one of the younger girls said, "The master has bought me a husband."

Another: "Oh no, for me. I saw him in my dreams."

Another: "Someone more persuasive will get him."

"And I suppose you're more persuasive."

"Well, are you?"

And so they began to quarrel.

Xanthus' wife said, "And where is the object of this high praise of yours?"

Xanthus: "He's at the door, my dear. It's a point of training not to enter another man's house unbidden. He came with me as far as the entry and is waiting there to be called."

Xanthus' wife said, "Someone call this new acquisition."

While the other maids were quarreling, the only one of them with any sense said to herself, "I'll go out now and get myself engaged to him first." She went out and said, "Where's the new slave?"

Aesop turned around and said, "Here, girlie."

She said, "Are you the new slave?"

Aesop said, "I'm the one."

The maid: "And where's your tail?"

Aesop took a look at the girl and, realizing that she was making fun of his dog's head, said, "My tail doesn't grow behind the way you think, but here in front."

The maid said, "You stay right here. If you go in, they'll take one look at what a monstrosity you are and all run away." When she went in and saw that her companions were still fighting, she said, "Girls, I might just as well puncture your little dreams. Why are you having this boxing match over the fellow? Suppose you have a look at his beauty first."

One of them went out and say, "Where is the gentleman, the one who was bought, my beauty."

Aesop said, "Here."

The maid said, "May Aphrodite slap your ugly face! So we were fighting over you, were we, you trash? Worse luck to you. Go on in and don't touch me; don't come near me."

Aesop went in and stood before his mistress. (31) Xanthus' wife, when she saw Aesop's repulsive face, turned away and said to Xanthus, "Hah, Xanthus, you've behaved very shrewdly, like a philosopher and a gentlemen; you wanted to take another wife, and since you didn't dare to face me and say 'leave my house,' knowing how fastidious I am, you brought me this so that I wouldn't put up with having him for a servant and would run away and leave the house of my own accord. All right, give me my dowry, and I'll go my way."

Xanthus said, "Oh my, you had all that sesquipedalian verbiage for me to keep me from urinating as I walked, and now you haven't a word for her."

Aesop said, "Well, let her go her way and be damned."

Xanthus said, "Shut up, you trash. Don't you realize that I love her more than my life?"

Aesop said, "You love the woman?"

Xanthus said, "I certainly do."

Aesop said, "You want her to stay?"

Xanthus said, "I do, you contemptible fool."

Aesop said, "I'll play the role you choose." And, striking a pose, he stamped his foot and roared out, "If Xanthus the philosopher is henpecked, I'll show him up in the lecture halls tomorrow for the contemptible thing he is."

Xanthus said, "Would that be any way to behave, Aesop?"

(32) Aesop said to his mistress, "Woman, what you are after is to have your husband go out somewhere and buy a good-looking young slave with a nice face, a good eye, and blond hair."

Xanthus' wife said, "Why?"

Aesop said, "So that this handsome slave can go to the bath with you, then the handsome slave will take your clothes, then when you come out of the bath, this handsome slave will put your wrapper around you and get down and put your sandals on, then he'll play with you and look into your eyes as though you were a fellow servant who had caught his fancy, then you'll smile at him and try to look young, and you'll feel all excited and ask him to come into the bedroom to rub your feet, then in a fit of prurience you will draw him to you and kiss him passionately and do what is in keeping with your shameful impudence, and the philosopher will be disgraced and made a fool of. Well done, Euripides! Your lips should have turned to gold when you said,

> Dread the anger of the waves of the sea,
> Dread the blasts of river and burning fire,
> Dread poverty, dread a thousand other things,
> But no evil is there anywhere so dread as woman.

And you, the wife of a philosopher, an intelligent woman, with your urge to have handsome male servants, you bring no slight discredit and disrepute on your husband. It's my opinion that you are sex-crazy and don't follow your bent simply because you are afraid that I'll give you a piece of a new slave's mind, you slut."

Xanthus' wife said, "What has brought this calamity on?"

Xanthus said, "He's already said this much to you, my dear, but watch out he doesn't see you defecating or urinating, for you'll find Aesop turned a regular Demosthenes."

Xanthus' wife said, "By the Muses, the little fellow seems to be spirited and tricky. I'd better make my peace with him."

Xanthus said, "Your mistress has made her peace with you."

Aesop said, "A great accomplishment to have tamed a woman by overawing her."

Xanthus said, "Bah, you runaway!"

(33) Xanthus' wife said, "Aesop, it's obvious from what you've said that you know how to use your tongue, but I was misled by a dream, for I thought I was going to have a good-looking slave bought for me, but you're deformed."

Aesop said, "Don't be surprised, my mistress, at having been tripped up by the dream; not all dreams are true. At the request of the leader of the Muses (*i.e.* Apollo), Zeus gave him the gift of prophecy so that he excelled everyone in oracular skill. But the leader of the Muses, from being marveled at by all men and habitually looking down on everyone else, got to be too boastful in everything. This angered his superior, and since he didn't want him to have so much power among men, he contrived some true dreams that would tell men in their sleep what was going to happen. When the superior of the Muses realized that no one was going to have any use for him and his prophecy, he asked Zeus to forgive him and not to discredit his oracle. Zeus forgave him and contrived other dreams for men that would give them false indications in their sleep, so that once they had found the dreams inaccurate, they would fall back again on the original prophet. That's why it is that one of the second kind of dreams, when it comes, gives the impression of truth to what you see in your sleep. So don't be surprised if you see things one way in your sleep, and they turn out otherwise, for it wasn't the first kind you saw, but one of the lying ones come to trick you with false visions."

(34) Xanthus complimented Aesop and, realizing that he had a knack of finding the right thing to say, told him, "Take a shopping bag and come along with me. We'll buy some vegetables from the garden." Aesop put the bag on his shoulder and went along. When they came to the garden and found the gardener, Xanthus said, "Give me some cooking vegetables." The gardener took his knife and cut some cabbage, some beets, some asparagus tips, and other savory vegetables, which he arranged neatly in a small bundle and gave to Aesop. Xanthus opened his purse and was about to pay for the vegetables.

(35) The gardener said, "What's this for, professor?"

Xanthus said, "The pay for the vegetables."

The gardener said, "What do I care? As for the garden and the produce, you can wipe your feet on them. But just tell me one thing."

Xanthus said, "Well, by the Muses, I'll have neither the pay nor the vegetables until you tell me how anything I say can help you as a gardener. I'm no craftsman or smith to make you a hoe or a leek slicer; I'm a philosopher."

The gardener said, "Sir, you'll do me a great favor. There's a little question that's been bothering me and keeping me from sleeping at night. I keep puzzling and asking myself why it is that when I put plants in the ground and then hoe them and water them and give them all kinds of attention, the weeds still show up before the things I've planted."

When Xanthus heard this philosophical conundrum and couldn't, on the spur of the moment, think of an answer to it, he said, "All things are subject to the stewardship of divine providence."

(36) Aesop, who was standing behind Xanthus, began to laugh. Xanthus said, "Aesop, are you laughing with me or at me?"

Aesop said, "Oh, not at you."

Xanthus said, "Well, then, at whom?"

Aesop said, "At the professor you studied under."

Xanthus said, "You blackguard, this is blasphemy against the Hellenic world, for I studied at Athens under philosophers, rhetoricians, and philologists. And do you have the effrontery to set foot on the Muses' Helicon?"

Aesop said, "If you talk nonsense, you'll have to expect to be jeered at."

Xanthus said, "Is there any other answer to the question? Things that are at the disposal of the divine order of nature are not subject to inquiry by philosophers. I suppose you have an answer to the question, do you?"

Aesop said, "Offer to do it, and I will resolve the question for you."

(37) Xanthus was embarrassed and said, "Don't be so presumptuous. I, who have debated in many great halls, have no business arguing with you here in the garden, but come along." As they strolled along, Xanthus said to the gardener, "This boy of mine here is a fellow of vast and varied experience. Put the problem up to him, and he will answer it."

The gardener said, "Now look here, do you mean to say this ugly fellow knows his letters?"

Aesop said, "Is this any way for you to talk, you miserable wretch."

The gardener said, "I'm a miserable wretch?"

Aesop said, "You're a gardener, aren't you?"

The gardener said, "Yes."

Aesop said, "Well then, if you're a gardener, do you object to being called a miserable wretch? But you want to know why it is that you put plants in the ground, hoe them, water them, lavish care on them, and still, as you say, the uncultivated weeds come up quicker than the things you plant. [Listen and pay attention. It's just as it is with a woman who comes to a second marraige with children by her first husband and finds her husband has children by a former wife. She is mother of the children she brings with her but a stepmother to the ones she finds. And there is a great deal of difference between the two things. She lavishes affection on the rearing of the children she has borne, but out of jealousy she hates the ones produced by someone else's birth pangs. Moreover, she shortens the rations for the latter and gives them to her own children, for she naturally loves her own and hates her husband's as strangers. It's the same with the earth. She is the mother of plants that grow spontaneously, but a stepmother to the ones you plant, and by giving more nurture to her own, she makes them flourish better than the orphans you plant."

When the gardener had heard this, he said, "You've relieved me of a great deal of concern. Take the vegetables as a gift. And if you want anything else, come to the garden as though it were your own."]

[*At this point a page has been lost from the manuscript. From what is told in sections 39 and 44 it is clear that what is lost told how Aesop took the vegetables home and somehow provoked Xanthus' wife, who proceeded to trample the vegetables under foot. There is no clear indication of what else may have been lost, but whatever it was, it led up to the speech of Xanthus with which the text resumes.*]

(38) ". . . harm me by doing anything more or less than you are told. Pick up the oil flask and the towels, and let's go to the bath."

Aesop said to himself, "Masters who show an unnecessarily stern attitude about the service they want have themselves to blame for the trouble they get into. I'll give this philosopher a lesson in how to give orders." So he picked up the articles mentioned and, without putting any oil in the flask, followed Xanthus to the bath.

Xanthus got undressed, handed his robes to Aesop, and said, "Give me the oil flask."

Aesop gave it to him, and when Xanthus took it, turned it up, and found nothing in it, he said, "Aesop, where's the oil?"

Aesop said, "At home."

Xanthus said, "Why?"

Aesop said, "Because you told me to 'take the oil flask and the towels,' but you didn't mention oil. I wasn't supposed to do anything more than I was told. If I slipped up on my instructions, I was going to be answerable at the cost of a beating." That was all he said.

(39) When Xanthus found some of his friends at the bath, he told Aesop to give the robes to their servants and said to him, "Aesop, go on home, and since my wife trampled the vegetables in her temper, go out and cook us lentil. Put it in the pot, put some water in with it, put it on the cooking hearth, put some wood under it, and light it; if it starts to go out, blow on it. Now do as I say."

Aesop: "I'll do it." And he went home, went to the kitchen, put one lentil in the pot, and cooked it.

When Xanthus and his friends had had their bath, he said, "Gentlemen, will you share my simple fare? There will be lentil. We ought to judge our friends by their good will and not by the elegance of their food. On occasion the humblest dishes afford a more genial pleasure than more pretentious ones if the host serves them with a gracious welcome."

His friends said, "Let's go." (40) Xanthus took them to his house and said, "Aesop, give us something to drink for men right from the bath."

Aesop filled a pitcher straight from the bathtub and gave it to Xanthus. Xanthus said, "What's this?"

Aesop said, "Something to drink, right from the bath."

Xanthus looked sullen, and after a moment he said, "Bring me the footbath."

Aesop brought it without any water and set it down. Xanthus said, "And what's this?"

Aesop said, "You said: 'Bring me the footbath.' You didn't say: 'Put water in it, and wash my feet.' "

Xanthus said, "Take my sandals and get on with your work." Then he said to his friends, "Gentlemen, I find that I haven't bought a slave but purchased myself a teacher. Now, if you like, we'll get up and go to the table." (41) When the drink had been going around for some time, Xanthus said, "Aesop, is the lentil cooked?"

Aesop said, "Yes."

Xanthus said, "Let me see if it is done."

Aesop brought the one lentil in a spoon and gave it to Xanthus. Xanthus ate the one lentil and said, "It's all right. It's done. Bring it in and serve it." Aesop put on a plate, poured the soup, and said, "Dinner is served."

Xanthus said, "Why, this is nothing but soup you've served. Where is the lentil?"

Aesop said, "Why, you ate the lentil."

Xanthus said, "Did you just cook one?"

Aesop said, "Yes. Didn't you tell me to 'cook lentil' and not 'lentils'? The one is singular and the other plural."

(42) Xanthus said, "Just so that I won't appear to be insulting the gentlemen, go quickly and prepare with vinegar and seasoning the four pig's feet you bought."

Aesop put the feet into a kettle and started to cook them. Xanthus, looking for a pretext to thrash Aesop, got up and said to him, "Aesop, go fetch the vinegar from the pantry and put it in the kettle." Then, while Aesop was gone to the pantry, Xanthus came in, took one foot from the kettle, and hid it. When Aesop came back and saw three feet in the kettle, he realized that Xanthus had deliberately removed the foot because he wanted to have a pretext for beating him. Having noted a pig that was kept in Xanthus' yard and that was supposed to be killed for Xanthus' wife's birthday, he quickly tied up its snout with a cord and cut off one of its feet. Then, when he had singed it over the fire and scalded it, he threw it into the kettle to replace the one that had been stolen. Xanthus, suspecting that Aesop would run away if he didn't find the foot, took it out of hiding, went out, and threw it into the kettle. That made five feet. But Aesop didn't know there were five feet, and neither did Xanthus. (43) After a while, Xanthus said to Aesop, "Have you cooked the pig's feet?"

Aesop said, "Yes."

Xanthus said, "Then bring them in."

Aesop put a dish on the table, emptied the kettle, and out came five feet. When he saw this, Xanthus turned pale and said, "Aesop, how many feet did this one pig have?"

Aesop said, "It comes out all right. Here are five feet, and the pig we're feeding outside has three."

Xanthus said, "Gentlemen, this fellow will soon drive me mad."

Aesop said, "Well, you shouldn't have laid the law down to me so literally, and I would have served you properly. But don't feel sorry about it, master. The way you stated the rule for me will turn out to your advantage, for it will teach you not to make mistakes in the classroom. Statements that go too far in either inclusion or exclusion are no small errors."

Xanthus, finding no pretext for beating Aesop, held his peace.

(44) Thereafter Aesop attended him in the classroom and became a familiar figure to everyone. Once one of the students planned a dinner to which he invited Xanthus and the other students. Xanthus said to Aesop, "Get what I need for a dinner, and come along. I mean a basket, a plate, a napkin, a lantern, sandals, and anything I may have forgotten to mention." Aesop got them and went along. In the course of the dinner Xanthus took portions and gave them to Aesop. Aesop took them and put them in the basket. Xanthus turned to Aesop and said, "Do you have all the portions?"

Aesop said, "I have."

Xanthus said, "Then take them to her who loves me."

Aesop said, "I will." As he went out, Aesop said to himself, "Now is my chance to pursue my feud with the mistress and pay her back for poking fun at me and running me down just after I was bought, for tearing up and trampling the vegetables I was given by the gardener, and for not giving my gift a chance to please the master. I'll show her that a wife can't match strength with a friendly slave. Since the master said: 'Give the portion to her who loves me,' now let him see who loves him." (45) When Aesop got home and went into the house, he put the basket down before him and called Xanthus' wife. He showed her all the portions and said, "Mistress, observe carefully; nothing is missing, and nothing has been eaten."

Xanthus' wife said, "Everything is all right and in good shape, Aesop. Did your master send this to me?"

Aesop said, "No."

Xanthus' wife said, "And to whom did he send it?"

Aesop said, "To her who loves him."

Xanthus' wife said, "And who loves him, you runaway?"

Aesop said, "Just wait a little, and you'll see who loves him." Seeing the thoroughbred bitch who was a pet in the house, he called her and said, "Come, Lycaena; take this." The bitch came running, and he gave the food to her. When she had eaten it all, Aesop went back to where the dinner was being given and took his place behind the couch at Xanthus's feet.

(46) Xanthus said, "Well, Aesop, did you give it to her?"

Aesop said, "I did."

Xanthus said, "Did she eat it?"

Aesop said, "Yes, she ate it all."

Xanthus said, "Was she able to eat all of it?"

Aesop said, "Yes, she was hungry."

Xanthus said, "Did she enjoy it?"

Aesop said, "Yes, she did."

Xanthus said, "What did she say?"

Aesop said, "She didn't say anything, but in her heart she certainly expressed her gratitude."

Xanthus said, "I'll get even with her."

Xanthus' wife said to her maids, "Girls, I can't stay with Xanthus any longer. Let him give me my dowry, and I'll go away. When he prefers the dog to me, how can I live with him any longer?" So she went off in a bad mood to the bedroom.

(47) As the drinking went on, there was extended conversation, and as you might expect among men of scholarly interests, all manner of questions were brought up. One of the students said, "What circumstance will produce great consternation among men?"

Aesop, standing behind his master, said, "If the dead were to arise and demand back their property."

There was much laughter and a lot of buzzing among the students, and they said, "This is the newly bought slave, the one Xanthus bought when we were there." One of them said, "He once said I was a silly ass." Another said, "Some of the things he says are his own ideas, but the rest he learns from Xanthus."

Aesop said, "So it is with all of you."

The students said, "By the Muses, professor, do let Aesop have a drink." Xanthus gave him permission, and Aesop had a drink. (48) One of the students said to the others, "Why is it that a sheep being led to the slaughter doesn't make a sound, but a pig squeals loudly?"

When no one could find an answer to the question, Aesop said, "Because the sheep has its milk, which is useful, and its wool, which is beautiful, and when the time comes, it is shorn of its wool, which is heavy, and in getting milked is also unburdened, so that when it is led to the sacrifice, since it expects no harm, it goes along happily and doesn't try to run away when the knife is put to it. But the pig squeals so loudly because it doesn't have any wool that is useful nor any milk. No wonder it makes a big noise since it knows that it is being led off for the use that will be made of its meat."

The students said, "A clear answer, by the Muses!"

(49) When they all left, Xanthus went back home and went to the bedroom, where he began to talk sweet talk to his wife and shower her with kisses. But she turned her back on Xanthus and said, "Don't come near me, you slave-lover, or rather you dog-lover. Give me back my dowry."

Xanthus said, "Of all the bad luck. Now what has Aesop cooked up for me?"

Xanthus' wife said, "Go take her to whom you sent all the food."

Xanthus said, "Didn't I say Aesop had started a rumpus for me? Someone call Aesop." (50) Aesop came in, and Xanthus said, "Aesop, to whom did you give the food?"

Aesop said, "You told me: 'Give it to her who loves me.' "

Xanthus' wife said, "I didn't get a thing. There he is. Let him deny it to my face."

Xanthus said, "There, you runaway, she says she didn't get it."

Aesop said, "To whom did you say I should give the food?"

Xanthus said, "To her who loves me."

Aesop said, "And wherein does this woman love you?"

Xanthus said, "Well then, who does, you runaway?"

Aesop said, "Find out who loves you," and calling the dog, he said, "She loves you. Your wife says she loves you, but she doesn't. Here's your proof. This woman who you think loves you wants her dowry back and is ready to leave you for the sake of a little bit of food. Beat your dog, thrash her within an inch of her life, knock her down, drive her off, and she won't go away. She'll forget your mistreatment, she'll turn around and come back to look for her master with her tail wagging. So you ought to have said to me: 'Take it home to my wife' and not to her who loves me,' for it's not the woman who loves you but the dog."

Xanthus said, "You see, my dear, it wasn't my mistake; it was the doubletalk of this fellow who brought it. I'll find some excuse to beat him and get even for you."

[(50a) She said, "From now on I'll no longer live with you." And she sneaked out and went to her parents.

Aesop said to his master, “Didn’t I tell you it was the dog who loved you, and not my mistress?”

When several days passed and she was still not reconciled, Xanthus sent some friends to urge her to come back to him. Since Xanthus was very disconsolate at being deprived of his wife, Aesop went to him and said, “Don’t grieve, master, for tomorrow I’ll make her come back to you of her own accord.” He took some money and went to the market, where he bought some birds, some geese, and other things. He carried them with him as he passed the place where his mistress was, pretending, of course, not to know that Xanthus’ wife was there. Finding one of her parents’ slaves, he said to him, “Brother, I don’t suppose the people in this house have any geese or anything of the sort that would be good for a wedding, do they?”

He said, “And what do you need them for?”

Aesop: “Xanthus, the philosopher, is going to take a wife tomorrow.”

He ran off home and reported this to Xanthus’ wife. As soon as she heard it, she hurried off to Xanthus and screamed at him, “Xanthus, you can’t take up with another woman while I’m alive.”]

(51) The next day Xanthus sent out invitations to the students who had entertained him at dinner and said to Aesop, “I’ve invited my friends to dinner; go cook the best, the finest thing imaginable.”

Aesop said to himself, “I’ll show him not to give me stupid orders.” So he went to the butcher shop and bought the tongues of the pigs that had been slaughtered. When he came back, he prepared them all, boiling some, roasting some, and spicing some. At the appointed hour the guests arrived.

Xanthus said, “Aesop, give us something to eat.” Aesop brought each a boiled tongue and served hot sauce with it.

The students said, “Hah, Xanthus, even your dinner is fraught with philosophy. You never do anything that isn’t carefully worked out. At the very beginning of the dinner we’re served tongues.”

(52) After they had two or three drinks, Xanthus said, “Aesop, give us something to eat.” Again Aesop served each a roast tongue with salt and pepper.

The students said, “Wonderful, professor, excellent, by the Muses. Every tongue is sharpened by fire, and best of all by salt and pepper, for the salt combines with the sharpness of the tongue to give it a glib and biting effect.”

After they had drunk again, Xanthus said, for the third time, “Bring us food.”

Aesop brought each of them a spiced tongue. One student said to another, “Democritus! I’m getting tongue-tied eating tongues.”

Another student said, “Is there nothing else to eat? Whatever Aesop has a hand in will come to no good end.”

When the students tried to eat the spiced tongues, they were seized with nausea. Xanthus said, "Aesop, give us each a bowl of soup."

Aesop served them tongue broth. The students didn't even touch this but said, "This is Aesop's master stroke; we admit defeat by tongue."

Xanthus said, "Aesop, do we have anything else?"

Aesop said, "We have nothing else."

(53) Xanthus said, "Nothing else, damn you? Didn't I tell you: 'Buy the finest, the most delicious thing imaginable'?"

Aesop said, "I am glad you find fault with me in the presence of scholarly gentlemen. You told me: 'Buy the finest, the most delicious, the greatest thing imaginable.' Well, what can one imagine finer or greater than the tongue? You must observe that all philosophy, all education, depends on the tongue. Without the tongue nothing gets done, neither giving, nor receiving, nor buying. By means of the tongue states are reformed and ordinances and laws laid down. If, then, all life is ordered by the tongue, nothing is greater than the tongue."

The students said, "Yes, well put, by the Muses. It was your mistake, professor." They went home, and all night long they suffered from seizures of diarrhea.

(54) The next day the students took Xanthus to task. Xanthus said, "Gentlemen and scholars, it was not my fault; it was the fault of that worthless slave. But tomorrow I'll repay you your dinner, and I'll give him his orders in your presence." Then and there he called Aesop and said to him, "Since you are determined to turn my words around, go to the market and buy the most worthless, the most inferior thing there is."

When Aesop heard this, nothing daunted, he went to the butcher, and again he bought the tongues of all the pigs that had been butchered. Then he went back and prepared them for dinner. Xanthus came home with his students, and they took their places at table. After they had the first drink, he said, "Aesop, give us something to eat."

Aesop served each a pickled tongue and hot sauce. The students said, "What's this, tongues again?" Xanthus turned pale. The students said, "Maybe he wants the vinegar to help our stomachs recover from yesterday's diarrhea."

After they had another drink or two, Xanthus said, "Give us something to eat." Aesop served each of them a roast tongue. The students said, "Bah, what's this? Our dunderhead of yesterday is trying to make us sick again with his tongues."

(55) Xanthus said, "What? Again, you filthy villain? Why did you buy these? Didn't I tell you: 'Go to the market, and if you can find anything inferior, anything worthless, buy it'?"

Aesop said, "And what is there that is bad which does not come about through the tongue? It is because of the tongue that there are enmity, plots, battles, rivalry, strife, wars. Is it not, then, true that there is nothing worse than this most abominable tongue?"

One of the students at the table said, "Professor, if you pay attention to him, he'll soon drive you mad. Like body, like mind. This abusive and malicious slave isn't worth a penny."

Aesop said, "Quiet, student. I think you're far more malicious. You don't have the distinction Xanthus has, but you fan a master's anger with your inflammatory talk and egg the master on against his slave. This isn't the way of a man who minds his own business but that of a busybody, poking your nose into another man's business."

(56) Xanthus, looking for a pretext to give Aesop a beating, said to him, "Since I have to pursue philosophic discussions with my own slave, you said my friend was a busybody; prove that he is a busybody."

Aesop said, "He certainly is a busybody. There are many men who eat and drink at the expense of others and also poke their nose into others' business, but there are men who reflect on their own troubles and do not act the busybody."

Xanthus said, "Well, if you say there is a man who is not a busybody, I'll give you another order and cancel the one I gave you before. Someone else shall prepare the dinner tomorrow. You go out and invite me to dinner a man who is not a busybody. And if he acts the busybody in any way, the first time I'll say nothing, the second time I'll let it go, the third time you'll get a hiding and take the consequences."

(57) After hearing what Xanthus said to him, Aesop went out the next day to the market and looked for a man who was not a busybody. [He found a fight going on with a crowd standing all around and one man sitting off to the side, reading. Aesop said to himself, "I'll invite him. He doesn't appear to be a busybody, and I'll avoid a beating." So he went to him and said, "Most refined sir, Xanthus the philosopher has heard of your gentility and invites you to dinner."

He said, "I shall come. You will find me at the front door."

So Aesop went home and prepared dinner. Xanthus said, "Aesop, where is the man who is not a busybody?"

He replied, "He is standing at the front door."

At the appointed hour Xanthus brought him in and gave him a place at table among his friends. (58) He ordered honeyed wine to be served to his guest first, but the guest said, "Oh, no, sir. You must drink first, then your wife, and then we, your friends."

Xanthus nodded to Aesop, "I have you once." For the guest had shown himself something of a busybody. Then a fish soup was served. Xanthus, looking for a pretext, said, "With all the condiment I've provided my cuisine is insulted; this has no spices, no oil, and the broth is curdled. The cook must be beaten."

The guest said, 'Stop, master! Nothing's amiss. Everything's all right."

Xanthus nodded to Aesop, "There's twice." Then a rich sesame cake was brought in. Xanthus tasted it and said, "Call the baker. This cake has no honey and no raisins."

Again the guest said, "The cake is fine, too, and there's nothing wrong with the dinner. Don't beat your slaves without reason."

Again Xanthus nodded at Aesop. "There's the third time."

He said, "I concede."

When the guests left after dinner, Aesop was strung up and beaten. Xanthus said to him. "That for you, and if you don't find me a man who is not a busybody, I'll put you on the rack and break you."

(59) The next day Aesop went outside the city and tried to find a man who was not a busybody. After he had watched many men pass by] he finally spotted a man who was crude in appearance but civil enough in his behavior. He was driving a little ass loaded with wood, avoiding the confusion of the throngs, and talking to his ass. Judging that this man would tend to his own business and not be a busybody, Aesop followed him.

The rustic was riding the ass, and as they went along, he kept talking to him, "Let's go. The sooner we get there and get the wood sold for a dozen farthings,* the sooner you'll get two of them for fodder. I'll take two for myself, and we'll keep the eight against bad times, for fear we'll get sick or some bad weather will come along unexpectedly and keep us from getting out; for if you eat barley today, and then some unexpected bad luck comes along, you'll have neither barley nor fodder to eat."

(60) When Aesop heard this, he said to himself, "By the Muses, I do think this man is no busybody; I'll approach him." So he went up to him and said, "Greetings, good sir." The rustic returned his greeting, and Aesop said, "How much do you want for your wood?"

The rustic said, "Twelve farthings."

Aesop said, "It's the truth; he's selling for the same price he mentioned before." Then to the rustic, "Good sir, do you know Xanthus, the philosopher?"

The rustic said, "No, son, I don't."

Aesop said, "How is that?"

The rustic said, "Because I'm not a busybody. I've heard of him, all right."

Aesop said, "Bless you, I'm his slave."

The rustic said, "Did I ask you whether you are a slave or a free man? What do I care?"

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*The original refers to *asses,* a small Roman monetary unit current at the time the *Life* was written.

Aesop said, "He really is no busybody. Good sir, you've sold your wood. Drive your ass to Xanthus' house."

The rustic said, "But I don't know where his house is."

Aesop said, "Follow me, and you'll find out." (61) And he led him to the house, unloaded the wood, paid him, and said, "Good sir, my master asks you to have dinner with him; so leave your ass in the courtyard, and he'll be taken care of."

The rustic went in to dinner without bothering to ask why he was invited and went in just as he was with mud on his shoes. Xanthus said, "Is this the man who's no busybody." . . .*

Xanthus, seeing that Aesop made very strong claims about the man, said to his wife, "My dear, do you want to see Aesop taught a lesson?"

Xanthus' wife said, "That's what I'm praying for."

Xanthus said, "Then do as I say. Get up and take a basin over to the stranger as though you intended to wash his feet. From your appearance he'll know that you're the lady of the house and won't let you do it but will say: 'Lady, don't you have any slave to wash my feet?' He'll be shown up as a busybody, and Aesop will get a beating."

Xanthus' wife hated Aesop so much that she tied a towel around her, threw another over her arm, and took the basin over to the stranger. He saw that she was the lady of the house and said to himself, "Xanthus is a philosopher. If he wanted my feet washed by a slave, he would have ordered it, but if he has made his wife wash my feet to show me honor, I'll not disgrace myself and be a busybody. I'll just put my feet out and let them be washed." And he took his ease while they were being washed.

(62) Xanthus said, "Clever, by the Muses!" And he ordered the honeyed wine to be served to the stranger first.

The stranger said to himself, "The hosts ought to drink first, but the philosopher ordered the drink served me first to do me honor, so I'll not be a busybody." And he took it and drank it.

Xanthus told them they could serve the dinner, and a plate of fish was brought on. Xanthus told the rustic to help himself. The rustic began to gulp them down like Charybdis. Xanthus took a taste, and wishing to draw the rustic out so that he would say something to show himself a busybody, he said, "Boy, call the cook." The cook came in, and Xanthus said, "Tell me, you runaway, when you got all the ingredients, why didn't you put in any oil or sardine paste or pepper? Strip him and beat him."

The rustic said to himself, "It's well seasoned and nothing is missing. But if Xanthus is so mad at his cook that he wants to beat him, I'll not play the busybody."

The unhappy cook got his beating, and Xanthus said to himself, "I think this man must be deaf or dumb and doesn't speak at all." Then after dinner the cake was brought in. The rustic, who had never so much as seen a picture of a cake, began to break off square chunks about the size of bricks and gulp them down.

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*A few words appear to be missing.

(63) Again Xanthus took a taste and shouted, "Somebody call the baker." He came in, and Xanthus said, "Damn you, why doesn't the cake have any honey or pepper or any balsam, and why is it sour?"

The baker said, "Sir, if the cake is raw, blame me, but if it doesn't have any honey in it and is sour, it's not my fault but the mistress's. When I was making the cake, I asked her for honey, and she said: 'When I get back from the bath, I'll get some out.' Well, she was late, and since the cake didn't get honey in time, it turned out sour."

Xanthus said, "All right. If this is the result of my wife's carelessness, I'll burn her alive." To his wife he said, "Now, my dear, play your part." To Aesop he said, "Bring in some firewood, and make a pyre right here."

Aesop brought the wood in and made a big pyre. Xanthus took his wife and made her get in the midst of it, all the while watching the rustic to see if he would jump up in indignation and not let him go ahead. (64) The rustic didn't turn a hair but just sat there and finished his drink. He saw that Xanthus was trying him and said, "Sir, if you're determined to do this, wait a while till I run out to the farm and fetch my wife. You can burn the two of them."

Xanthus admired the coolness of this man who was clearly no busybody and said, "Aesop, I admit defeat. Enough of your tricks. Give this up and serve me in good faith from now on."

Aesop: "You'll find no cause to complain of me, master, and you'll find out what a faithful servant can be."

(65) The next day Xanthus said to Aesop, "Go see if there are many people at the bath."

On the way Aesop met the governor. The governor recognized Aesop and said to him, "Aesop, where are you going?"

Aesop said, "I don't know."

The governor said, "I ask you where you're going and you say, 'I don't know'?"

Aesop said, "By the Muses, I don't know."

The governor ordered him taken off to jail.

Aesop said, "Master, you can see that I answered you fairly, for I didn't know that I was going to be taken to jail."

The governor was so taken aback that he let him go.

(66) Aesop went on to the bath and saw a great crowd of bathers. He also saw a stone lying at the entrance—just lying there for no purpose; everyone who went in stumbled over it and cursed the man who put it there, but no one moved it out of the way. As he was marveling at the stupidity of the people who were stumbling over it, one man stumbled

and said, "Damn the man who put that stone there," but he moved the stone aside and went on in.

Aesop went back to Xanthus and said, "Master, I found one man at the bath."

Xanthus said, "One? Here's a chance to bathe without being crowded. Get the things for my bath." When Xanthus went in and saw a great crowd bathing he said, "Aesop, didn't you tell me: 'I found one man at the bath'?"

Aesop said, "I certainly did. You see this stone? It was lying at the entrance, and all the bathers stumbled on it, but no one had the common sense to move it. After all of them stumbled on it, one man stumbled and then moved it so that others coming in wouldn't have the same trouble. I thought he was really a man in comparison with the other men, and I told you the truth."

Xanthus: "Aesop is never slow to give an explanation of things he does wrong."

(67) When he had finished bathing, Xanthus called Aesop to bring what he needed and went to dinner. When they had been drinking for some time, Xanthus' belly reminded him that it was time to go out to answer the call of nature. Aesop stood by with a towel and a pitcher of water. Xanthus said to him, "Can you tell me why it is that when we defecate, we often look at our own droppings?"

Aesop: "Because long ago there was a king's son, who as a result of the looseness of his bowels and his loose way of living, sat there for a long time relieving himself—for so long that before he knew it, he had passed his own wits. Ever since then when men relieve themselves, they look down for fear they, too, have passed their wits. But don't you worry about this. There's no danger of your passing your wits, for you don't have any."

(68) Returning, Xanthus took his place at the table. As the drinking went on apace and Xanthus was beginning to be more than a little drunk, they began to pose questions and conundrums, as men who are inclined to speculation will. When a fight started over the posing of the questions, Xanthus started to join in the dispute and was behaving as though he were in the lecture hall instead of at a drinking party. Aesop sensed that he was going to get into a fight and said, "When Dionysus invented wine, he mixed three cups and showed men how they should use drink: the first for pleasure, the second for good cheer, and the third for rashness. Now then, my master, since you have drunk the cup of pleasure and that of good cheer, leave that of rashness to the youngsters. You have your lecture halls where you can show off your talents."

Xanthus, who was drunk by this time, said, "Will you shut up, you swineherd? You're the devil's advocate."

Aesop: "Just wait, you'll go to the devil."

(69) One of the students, seeing that Xanthus was carried away with himself, said, "Professor, are all things possible for man?"

Xanthus: "Who turned the conversation to man? He will do anything and is capable of all things."

The student pressed the argument to the impossible and said, "Can any man drink the sea dry?"

Xanthus said, "That's easy. I'll drink it dry."

The student said, "If you don't drink it dry, what then?"

Xanthus, whose wits were the worse for all the wine he had drunk, said, "I'll stake my fortune on it, and if I don't drink it dry, I'll be destitute."

They put up their rings to guarantee the stakes. Aesop, who was standing at the foot of Xanthus' couch, rapped him on the knuckles and said, "What are you doing, master? Are you out of your mind? How can you drink the sea dry?"

Xanthus said, "Shut up, you garbage," not realizing what kind of stakes he had pledged.

(70) The next morning when Xanthus wanted to wash his face he said, "Aesop."

And Aesop said, "What is it, master?"

Xanthus: "Pour some water on my hands." Aesop took the pitcher and poured. When he had washed his face, Xanthus noticed that his ring was missing and said, "Aesop, what happened to my ring?"

Aesop: "I don't know."

Xanthus: "Bah!"

Aesop: "Well, anyhow, you'd better take whatever you can get away with of your fortune and put it away for a rainy day, for your fortune doesn't belong to you anymore."

Xanthus: "What do you mean?"

Aesop: "At the party yesterday you laid odds you could drink the sea dry, and you put up your ring as a guarantee of your fortune."

Xanthus: "And how can I drink the sea dry?"

Aesop said, "I stood there by you and said: 'Stop, master. What are you doing? It's impossible.' And you didn't believe me."

Xanthus fell at Aesop's feet and said, "Aesop, I beg of you, if your sharp wits can do it, find some pretext on which I can win or else get out of the bet."

Aesop: "Make you win I can't, but I'll see that you solve the problem."

Xanthus: "How? What's your idea?"

(71) Aesop: "When the stakeholder comes with the other party and tells you to drink the sea dry, don't say no, but now that you're sober, just repeat the terms you set when you were drunk. Bring out a table, have it put in front of you, and have servants stand by. This will make

an impression, for everyone will come running to see the show, thinking you're going to drink the sea dry. When you see the place is full, fill a cup with sea water, call the stakeholder forward and say: 'What were the terms of my agreement?' And he will say: 'That you would drink the sea dry.' You say: 'Is that all?' And he will say: 'Yes.' Then you call witnesses and say: 'My fellow citizens, there are many rivers and unfailing streams which flow into the sea. The terms of my agreement were that I would drink dry the sea only, and not the rivers that flow into it. Let the other party stop up the mouths of the rivers so that I will only have the sea to drink dry. But it's impossible to stop up the mouths of all the rivers in the world, and it's impossible for me to drink the sea dry.' So, when one impossibility is matched with another, it will break your agreement."

(72) Xanthus was astonished at the readiness of his wit and now looked forward with positive relish to the test. The man who had made the bet appeared at the front door with a group of leading citizens and challenged Xanthus, saying, "Make good your wager or turn over your fortune."

Aesop said, "You give us an account of your fortune, for we've already got the sea half-empty."

The student said, "Aesop, you're my slave. You don't belong to Xanthus any more."

Aesop: "No, you'd better hand your fortune over to my master and stop talking nonsense." So saying, he ordered the couch brought out and set up on the beach. He set the table out and some cups on it. Everybody came running, and Xanthus came down and took his place. Aesop stood by his master, filled the cups from the sea, and served them to him.

The student: "Devil take me! Is he really going to drink the sea dry?"

(73) As Xanthus was about to put the cup to his mouth, he said, "Where's the stakeholder?" He came forward, and Xanthus said to him, "What were the terms of my agreement?"

The student: "That you would drink the sea dry."

Xanthus: "Was that all?"

The stakeholder: "Yes."

Xanthus said to the people, "My fellow citizens, you know that there are many rivers and unfailing streams which flow into the sea. I only agreed to drink the sea dry, not the rivers, too. Let the other party close up the mouths of the rivers so that I won't have to drink up the rivers along with the sea." And the philosopher won the bet.

There was a great shout from the crowd in honor of Xanthus. The student fell at his feet and said, "Professor, you are a great man; you win; I concede. But I beg you to call the bet off." And they did call off the bet.

(74) Aesop said to Xanthus, "Master, I saved your fortune; I ought to get my freedom."

Xanthus: “Will you be quiet? This was not what I, at any rate, had in mind.”

Aesop, aggrieved, not at failing to get his freedom but at his master’s ingratitude, held his peace. [But to himself he said, “Just wait. I’ll get even with you.”

(75) One day Aesop lifted up his clothes and took his member in his hand so as to stimulate it. Xanthus’ wife saw him and said, “Aesop! What is this?”

Aesop replied, “Lady, I was cold during the night, and it helps me if I hold it in my hand.”

When the woman saw how long and thick it was, her lust was aroused, and she said to him, “Now, Aesop, if you’ll do what I want, you’ll have more pleasure than your master.”

He replied, “Lady, you know that if the master learns of this, it will be bad for me. He’ll be justified in making me pay the price for it.”

She smiled and said, “If you’ll go to bed with me ten times, I’ll give you a shirt.”

Aesop said, “Give me your oath.”

She was so excited that she took the oath, and Aesop took her word. He wanted to pay his master back. He went to bed with her nine times, and then he said, “Lady, I can’t do any more.”

She was burning with desire and said, “If you don’t do it ten times you’ll not get a thing from me.”

So he tried a tenth time and succeeded in letting the semen fall wide of the mark. And he said, “Give me the shirt. If you don’t, I’ll appeal to my master.”

The wife said, “I called on you to plow my field but you crossed the property line and worked in another field. Do it once more, and take the shirt.”

(76) When Xanthus came home, Aesop went to him and said, “Master, judge between me and my mistress.”

Xanthus said, “What?”

Aesop said, “My mistress and I were walking in the orchard and she saw a branch of a tree which was full of apples. She said to me: ‘If you can throw a rock and knock off ten apples, I’ll give you a shirt.’ I picked up a rock, threw it, and knocked off ten apples. But one apple fell in a manure pile, and now she won’t give me the tunic.”

When the woman heard this, she said to her husband, “Obviously there’s no argument about the nine, but, as for the tenth one which fell in the manure pile, I’m not satisfied. Let him throw again and knock off an apple and get the shirt.”

It was Xanthus’ judgment that she should give Aesop the shirt, and he said to Aesop, “Let’s go to the forum, and when we come back, knock off the tenth apple and get the shirt.”

Xanthus' wife said: "Yes, let him do that, and I will truly give him the shirt as you direct."]

(77) Xanthus said to Aesop, "Since I can interpret omens, go out and see if there is any bird of ill omen at the door. If you see a pair of crows there in front of the door, call me, for this sign means good luck for the man who sees it."

So Aesop went out and, as luck would have it, saw a pair of crows in front of the door. He came back in and said to Xanthus, "It's time for you to go out, for there's a pair of crows there."

The master: "Let's go." But while Aesop had been gone, one crow flew away, and when the master came out and saw one crow, he said, "Damn you! Didn't I tell you: 'Call me if you see a pair of crows,' and you call me although you saw only a single crow?"

Aesop: "One flew away, master."

The master: "Now you have made a mistake. Strip him. Bring the straps."

He got a thorough licking, but while he was still getting it, a slave of one of Xanthus' friends came in to invite him to dinner.

Aesop: "Master, you beat me unjustly."

Xanthus: "What do you mean, unjustly?"

Aesop: "Because you said a pair of crows was a good sign and a lucky one. I saw a pair of crows, and while I came to tell you about it, one of them flew away. But although you went out and saw a single crow, you got invited to dinner. It was I who saw the pair of crows, and I got a beating. Well, then, aren't signs and the interpretation of omens an idle business?"

Xanthus was surprised at this, too, and said, "Let him alone. Stop beating him." And he said he would come along to dinner.

[(77a) Several days later, Xanthus called Aesop and said to him: "Make us a good dinner, for I've invited my students. When Aesop had put everything in order for the dinner, as his mistress was lying there on the couch, he said to her, "Keep an eye on the table, mistress, so that the dog doesn't get in and eat any of the food."

She said, "Go on and don't worry about it; even my behind has eyes."

Aesop got busy with another task, and when he came back, he found his mistress asleep with her back to the table. Still afraid that the dog might get in and spoil the table and recalling that his mistress had said: 'Even my behind has eyes,' he raised her robe, exposed her rear, and left her lying there.

When Xanthus and his students came, they went in to dinner. Seeing her asleep and exposed, they turned their eyes away in shame. Xanthus said to Aesop, "Damn you, what is this?"

He said, "Master, while I was busy preparing to serve you, I told the mistress to keep an eye on the table so that the dog wouldn't get in and eat anything. She said to me: 'Go on and don't worry about this; even my behind has eyes.' Well sir, she's sound asleep, as you see, and I exposed her so that the eyes in her behind would see the table."

Xanthus said, "You runaway, you've embarrassed me many a time, but you've never done a more embarrassing thing than this, disgracing me and your mistress. But out of consideration for the guests I'll not lose my temper. I'll find a time to beat you thoroughly within an inch of your life."

(77b) Not long after this Xanthus had invited some rhetoricians and philosophers, and he said to Aesop, "Stand at the front door, and don't let any ignoramuses into the house, only scholars."

At the dinner hour Aesop closed the door and sat down inside. One of the guests came, and when he knocked on the door, Aesop said, "What does the dog shake?" The man thought he was calling him a dog and went off angry. So when Aesop addressed this remark to many others, they all went away feeling that what he said was an insult. But when one man came and knocked on the door and Aesop said, "What does the dog shake?" he said, "Its tail." When Aesop heard him give the right answer, he opened the door and let him in. He went to his master and said, "Sir, not another philosopher came to dine with you except this one man."

Xanthus was very much annoyed, since he thought they had played him false. The next day when they came to his lecture, they said to Xanthus, "Professor, apparently you wanted to humiliate us and, not having the face to do it yourself, put this filthy Aesop at the door to insult us and call us dogs."

Xanthus: "Is this something you dreamed, or is it the truth?"

The students: "Unless we are sleeping now, it's the truth."

Xanthus: "Somebody call Aesop." When he came, Xanthus said, "Tell me, you piece of filth, why, instead of bringing my friends and students into the house with all due respect to share my hospitality, did you humiliate them and insult them and turn them away with disrespect?"

Aesop: "Master, didn't you tell me: 'Don't let any unlearned men into the house, only rhetoricians and philosophers'?"

And Xanthus said, "Yes, you scarecrow, and what of it? Aren't these learned men?"

Aesop: "No. They are real ignoramuses, for when they knocked at your door and I stood inside and asked them: 'What does the dog shake?' not one of them understood what I said, and because they were stupid, I didn't let them in, except for this one man who answered me intelligently." And he pointed to the man who had dined with his master. When Aesop had given this explanation, they said he was right.

(78) A few days later Xanthus] walked out with Aesop to the edge of the city in pleasant conversation, and when he came to the cemetery, he was enjoying reading the epitaphs. Aesop saw the scrambled letters A B

Δ Ο Ε Θ Χ carved on one of the tombstones and pointed them out to Xanthus, saying, "What's this?"

Xanthus tried to figure out what the inscription was and what it signified. When he couldn't fathom it, he was perplexed and said, "What does it mean, Aesop?"

Aesop, seeing that his master was racking his brain, and having himself at the same time received the wisdom of the Muses as a mark of divine favor, said, "Master, if I find a treasure of gold with the help of this monument, what will you give me?"

When he heard this, the master said, "Half of the treasure and your freedom."

(79) When Aesop heard this, he immediately picked up a good-sized potsherd, paced off four steps from the monument, dug up the earth, brought up a treasure of gold, and gave it to his master. He said, "Master, give me what you promised."

Xanthus: "No, by the gods, I won't give it to you unless you tell me how you got the idea of finding the treasure, for I'm much more interested in learning this than I am in your discovery."

Aesop said, "Master, the man who buried this treasure here, being of a philosophical turn of mind, protected it and concealed it in a number of letters. You see how he inscribed the first letters of the words, for it says: 'A—stepping off, B—paces, Δ—four, O—dig, E—you will find, Θ—a treasure, X—of gold.' "*

Xanthus: "By Zeus, since you're such a good guesser and so smart, you'll not get what I promised."

When Aesop saw that he was going to be cheated of his reward, he said, "Well then, master, I warn you here and now to give the gold back to its owner."

Xanthus said, "And who is the owner of the treasure?"

Aesop said, "The king Dionysius of Byzantium."

Xanthus: "And how did you find this out?"

Aesop: "From the letters; they show it."

Xanthus: "How?"

Aesop: "Listen to what it says: 'A—return, B—to king, Δ—Dionysius, O—what you find, E—here, Θ—a treasure, X—of gold.' "

(80) When Xanthus saw that he had a good explanation, he said, "Aesop, take half the treasure and keep quiet."

Aesop: "Don't give it to me as a favor but as a gift from the man who buried it here."

Xanthus: "How's that?"

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*The Greek letters are, of course, the initials of the words which are given here in translation. In what follows two other sets of words with the same initials are substituted.

Aesop: "The letters indicate it, for they say: 'A—take up, B—go off, Δ—divide, O—what you find, E—here, Θ—a treasure, X—of gold.' "

Xanthus: "You're a great genius. Come on into the house where we can divide the gold, and you can get your freedom." But when he got into the house, he was afraid that if Aesop got his freedom, he would tell the king about the treasure, and so he ordered him to be tied up and locked in.

Aesop said, "Give me my freedom, and keep the gold."

Xanthus: "Very nice! And that will put you in a better position because of your rights as a freedman to demand the gold back and make your slander more credible to the king. You won't persuade me to do that."

Aesop: "Just you watch, master, and see if you don't free me of your own free will and if you aren't forced to do it."

Xanthus said, "You're stopped, so be quiet."

(81) About this time there was an election, and the citizens assembled in the theater. The Guardian of the Laws brought in the volume containing the laws of the city as well as the public seal, deposited them before the assembly, and said, "Fellow citizens, select the man you want to act as Guardian of the Laws: the keeper of the laws and the seal, the transactor of the city's business."

While they were still deliberating as to the man to whom they wanted to entrust this responsible position, an eagle swooped down, seized the seal, and flew away. The Samians were much disturbed, viewing this as a great portent which they regarded as no slight misfortune. They immediately called up seers and priests to interpret the portent that had appeared. Then, when no one could interpret the portent, an old man stood up in the crowd and said, "Men of Samos, we are on the point of paying attention to these fellows who fill their bellies from the offerings to the gods and gamble away their means under a cloak of decent behavior. You don't realize that it is no easy matter to tell the significance of a portent. If a man is not thoroughly educated, he will not properly analyze a portent. But we have Xanthus, the philosopher who is known to all of Greece, in our midst. Let us appeal to him to interpret the portent."

When he sat down, they shouted for Xanthus and appealed to him urgently to explain the portent. (82). Xanthus came forward and, when he couldn't think of what to say, requested time to get at the meaning of the portent. As the assembly was about to break up, the eagle swooped down again and dropped the seal into the lap of a public slave. They asked Xanthus to study the answer to this portent, too. Xanthus agreed and went off looking worried.

(83) He went back home and said, "I'm going to have to thank Aesop again so as to get a solution to this portent." And he went in and said,

"Call Aesop." And he came in with his chains on. Xanthus said, "Turn him loose."

Aesop said, "I don't want to be turned loose."

Xanthus: "But I am turning you loose so that you may give me a solution."

Aesop: "Then you're turning me loose for your own interest, are you?"

Xanthus said: "Stop it, Aesop. Let bygones be bygones."

When Aesop had been unshackled, he said, "What do you want, master?"

Xanthus told him about the portent. Aesop undertook the task. (84) The next day Aesop wanted to torment him and said, "Master, if it's a question of words, I have ready answers, but I can't do anything about the situation you describe, for I'm no seer."

When Xanthus heard this, he lost hope, and since he was ashamed to face the Samians, he began to think about suicide. He said, "The time has come to interpret the portent, and I can't face the shame of being a philosopher and not being able to do what I undertook." After this remark, at nightfall Xanthus got a rope and left the house.

(85) From the room where Aesop slept he saw his master going out, and realizing what he was about to do, he went after him, forgetting all about his bitterness over the gold. He watched until Xanthus got beyond the gate, fastened the rope to a tree, and was about to put his neck in the noose. Then from a distance he shouted, "Wait, master!"

The master turned around, and seeing Aesop running toward him in the moonlight, he said, "I'm caught by Aesop. Aesop, why do you call me back from the path of justice?"

Aesop: "Master, where is your philosophy? Where is your boasted education? Where is your doctrine of self-control? Come now, master, are you in such an ill-considered and cowardly rush to die that you would throw away the pleasure of life by hanging yourself? Think it over, master."

Xanthus, "Let me alone, Aesop, for I shall go through with this honorable death in preference to ingloriously claiming a life that I will have to lead in shame."

Aesop: "Put down the rope, master. I'll try to interpret the portent."

Xanthus: How?"

Aesop said, "Take me to the theater with you, and make up some plausible excuse for the crowd on the portent, something about the dignity of philosophy. Then put me forward as a pupil of yours. I'll have a solution, and at the proper moment I'll be called on to speak."

(86) With this argument he persuaded him to change his mind. When Xanthus came forward the next day, he began to speak as follows: "Since our system of logic has laid down certain limits of philosophy, I no longer

practice the interpretation of portents or omens from birds. But this service ought by all right to be performed by my household. In keeping, then, with my distinction as a philosopher, I shall give you my slave, to whom I have given philosophical instruction in such matters, and he will interpret your portent." So saying, he put Aesop forward.

(87) But when the Samians saw Aesop, they burst out laughing and shouted, "Bring us another interpreter to interpret this portent. What a monstrosity he is to look at! Is he a frog, or a hedgehog, or a potbellied jar, or a captain of monkeys, or a moulded jug, or a cook's gear, or a dog in a basket?"

Aesop heard all this without turning a hair, and when he had gotten silence, he began to speak as follows: (88) "Men of Samos, why do you joke and gape at me? You shouldn't consider my appearance but examine my wits. It's ridiculous to find fault with a man's intelligence because of the way he looks. Many men of the worst appearance have a sound mind. No one, then, should criticize the mind, which he hasn't seen, of a man whose stature he observes to be inferior. A doctor doesn't give up a sick man as soon as he sees him, but he feels his pulse and then judges his condition. When did anyone ever decide on a jar of wine by looking at it rather than by taking a taste? The Muse is judged in the theater and Aphrodite in bed. Just so, wit is judged in words."

So, when the Samians found that what he said didn't jibe with his appearance, they said to one another, "A clever fellow, by the Muses, with a real gift for speaking." And they shouted to him, "All right, interpret."

When Aesop saw that he had their favor, he seized on this opportunity to speak freely and began, (89) "Men of Samos, it is not creditable for a free people to have a slave interpret a portent. Therefore, allow me freedom of speech in what I have to say so that, if I hit the mark, I may receive the appropriate honors like a free man and that if I go wrong, I may be punished as a free man and not as a slave. If, then, you allow me to speak with the privilege of freedom, I shall proceed with what I have to say in full confidence."

(90) The Samians said to Xanthus, "We beg you, Xanthus, free Aesop." And the presiding officer said to Xanthus, "Make Aesop a free man."

Xanthus: "I shall not free a slave who has been in servitude for a very long time."

The presiding officer, seeing that Xanthus refused the proposition, said, "Accept the price you paid for him, turn him over to me, and I'll make him a freedman on behalf of the city."

When Xanthus reflected that he had bought Aesop for seventy-five denarii, in order not to appear to have refused to free Aesop because of stinginess, he brought him forward and said, "Xanthus, at the request of the people of Samos, lets Aesop go free."

(91) Once this was done, Aesop took his place before them and said, "Men of Samos, be your own allies and take council for your own freedom, for this is a portent of attack and an omen of enslavement. First, you will have a war. I tell you this, for I want you to understand that the eagle is the king of the birds and is more powerful than the others. And he flew down, removed the seal, the symbol of leadership, from the laws, and dropped it in the lap of a public slave. He moved the sure pledge of freemen to the dubious yoke of servitude. This is the interpretation of your portent. It is certain that one of the ruling kings is determined to destroy your freedom, to abrogate your laws, and set the seal of his own power upon you."

(92) Even as Aesop was saying this, there arrived from King Croesus an emissary in a white-bordered robe, asking for the officials of the Samians. When he heard that an assembly was being held, he came to the theater and presented his letter to the officers. They opened the letter and read it. The contents were the following: "Croesus, king of the Lydians, to the officers, the council, and the people of the Samians, greeting. From this moment I command you to pay public tribute and public taxes. If you will not do this, I shall do you harm to the full extent of the power of my kingdom."

(93) The officers advised the people to agree to pay so as to avoid bringing such an enemy as the king down on the city. But they honored Aesop as a true prophet of the outcome of the portent and called on him also to give them advice as to whether they should send the tribute or refuse. Aesop said to them, "Men of Samos, when your first citizens have given you the opinion that you should pay the tax to the king, do you ask me whether you should give it or not? If I say: 'Don't give it,' I'll mark myself as an enemy to King Croesus."

But the crowd shouted, "Give us your opinion."

Aesop said, "I will not give you advice but will speak in a fable. (94) Once, at the command of Zeus, Prometheus described to men two ways, one the way of freedom, and the other that of slavery. The way of freedom he pictured as rough at the beginning, narrow, steep, and waterless, full of brambles, and beset with perils everywhere, but finally a level plain amid parks, groves of fruit trees, and water courses where the struggle reaches its end in rest. The way of slavery he pictured as a level plain at the beginning, flowery and pleasant to look upon with much to delight but at its end narrow, hard, and like a cliff."

(95) The Samians recognized from what Aesop said where their interest lay and shouted with one accord to the emissary that they would take the rough road. He went back to the king and reported everything Aesop had said. When Croesus heard this, he called up his army and ordered it

to arms. His friends encouraged him, saying, "Master, let's sail for the island; let's conquer it; let's drag it off to the Atlantic Ocean and make it an example to other peoples so as to forestall anyone else getting the idea of opposing so great a king."

But a member of the royal family spoke with the king's permission. "I give you my oath by the sacred diadem which adorns your head, you will not be able to capture the Samians so long as the man called Aesop, who gave them advice, still lives. Demand of them by letter the surrender of Aesop. Say to them: 'Ask whatever you will for him, and I will give it to you.' "

(96) When Croesus had heard him, he ordered the man who gave this advice to go to Samos, for he had no ambassador who was more devoted or wiser. The man sailed without delay to Samos and, calling an assembly, persuaded the Samians to surrender Aesop rather than lose the king's friendship. And at first the people shouted, "Take him. Let the king have Aesop."

But Aesop came forward and said, "Men of Samos, I agree and would be content to die at the feet of the king, but I want to tell you a story that I wish you would have engraved on my tombstone when I'm dead. (97) When animals talked the same language as men, the wolves and the sheep started a war with one another. The wolves had the upper hand and were harassing the sheep; but then the dogs joined the sheep and routed the wolves. But while the wolves were running from the dogs, they sent an ambassador to the sheep. The wolf came and appeared before the sheep and talked like a politician. He said: 'If you want to enter into a peace treaty, surrender the dogs to us, and sleep in security with no fear of hostility.' The sheep, being stupid creatures, were persuaded and surrendered the dogs, and the wolves tore them to shreds. After a while, the wolves subjugated the sheep. According to this fable, you ought not to surrender useful men lightly."

(98) The Samians saw that the story was told for their benefit and decided to keep Aesop. But Aesop wouldn't stay and went away to Croesus with the ambassador. When the king saw Aesop, he was angry and said, "Look who prevented my subjugating a city and wouldn't let me collect taxes. It wouldn't be so bad if he were a man instead of this riddle, this monstrosity among men."

And Aesop said, "Sire, I was not brought to you by force but came of my own accord to your feet. You're like a man who has been suddenly wounded; he cries out on the spur of the moment at the suddenness of what has happened. Wounds are the business of physicians, but what I have to say will cure your temper. If I die at your feet, I will disgrace your regime, for you will always have your friends giving advice against your interest. When they figure out that those who give good counsel die, they will certainly speak contrary to the interest of your regime."

(99) The king was astonished at him and smiled and said, "Can you do me another favor and tell me stories of the ways of fortune with men?"

Aesop said, "When animals talked the same language as men, a poor fellow who was hard up for food used to catch insects that are called hummers. He would put them up in brine and sell them at a fixed price. One insect he got between his fingers and was about to kill, but it saw what was going to happen and said to him: 'Don't just idly kill me. I don't hurt the grain or the fruit or the flowers, and I don't harm the branches, but by moving my wings and feet together in harmony, I make a pleasant sound. I am a solace to the wayfarer.' The man was moved by what she said and let her go back to her native haunts. Just so I fall at your knees. Have pity on me, for I have no power to injure an army, nor am I so handsome that I might give false evidence against someone and get away with it. Poor as my body is, I utter words of commonsense and thereby benefit the life of mortals."

(100) The king liked his story and said, "I grant you your life. Ask for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you."

Aesop said, "Make peace with the Samians."

The king said, "I make peace."

Aesop fell at his feet and thanked him. Then he wrote down the stories and fables that go by his name even now and deposited them in the library. When he had gotten from the king a letter wherein he agreed to make peace with the Samians for the sake of Aesop, he sailed for Samos, taking many gifts with him. He called an assembly and read the king's letter. The Samians, recognizing that Croesus had made peace with them for the sake of Aesop, voted honors for him and named the place where he had been turned over the Aesopeum. As for Aesop, he sacrificed to the Muses and then built a shrine to them, erecting in their midst a statue of Mnemosyne and not of Apollo. Thereupon, Apollo became angry with him as he had once been with Marsyas.*

(101) After spending many years in Samos and being recognized with many honors, Aesop decided to tour the world. He lectured to audiences for a fee and, after traveling all around, came to Babylon, where Lycurgus was king. After giving an exposition of his philosophy, he was acclaimed as a great man by the Babylonians. Even the king became a great admirer of his character and wit and appointed him chamberlain. (102) In those days it was customary for kings to collect tribute from one another by means of contests in wit. They did not face one another in wars and battles but sent philosophical conundrums by letter, and the one who

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*Another Phrygian whose story is mentioned by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* VI 382 ff. He challenged Apollo to a musical contest, and when he lost, Apollo skinned him alive.

couldn't find the answer paid tribute to the sender. By answering the conundrums sent to Lycurgus Aesop won reputation for the king. He also provided the problems for Lycurgus to send the other kings, and they, being unable to discover answers, paid tribute. In this way the kingdom of the Babylonians expanded until it not only included barbarian nations but even most of the lands up to Greece itself were subjugated.

(103) Aesop made the acquaintance of a young man of good family at Babylon, and since he was childless, adopted him, and presented him to the king as the heir to his own wisdom. He lavished every care on his education, but the young man began to get a big head, became involved with the king's concubine, and was enjoying the sport. Aesop saw this and was so angered that he repeatedly threatened him, saying that anyone who touched the king's woman was bringing on his own death. (104) The boy was put out at what Aesop said, and at the persuasion of his friends, made a false accusation against him to the king. He wrote a false letter in Aesop's name to the king's enemies saying that Aesop was ready to help them, and sealing it with Aesop's ring, he turned it over to the king with the words, "This is your faithful friend; just see how he is plotting against your rule."

The king was convinced by the seal and in a rage ordered a captain of the guard to kill Aesop for a traitor. But the captain didn't kill him, because he was his true friend. Since no one inquired into the matter, he kept him in the prison and reported to the king, "I have put Aesop to death." Helios succeeded Aesop as chamberlain.

(105) Some time later Nectanabo, king of Egypt, heard that Aesop was dead and sent an embassy to Lycurgus with a letter and a conundrum for him to resolve, knowing that with Aesop dead no one could be found among the Babylonians who could solve it. And this was the conundrum: "Nectanabo, king of Egypt, to Lycurgus, the Babylonian, greeting. I want to build a tower high in the air, one that touches neither earth nor heaven. Send me men to build it and one to answer any question I ask, and collect three years' tribute on behalf of the royal city. But if you cannot do this, I will collect ten years' tribute on behalf of all the territory under your rule."

(106) When Lycurgus read the letter, he was very much distressed at this sudden turn of events. He summoned all his friends to appear, including Hermippus, and said to them, "Can you solve the question of the tower, or shall I chop off all your heads?"

His friends said, "We don't know how a tower can be built that touches neither heaven nor earth."

Another said, "Sire, we wish to do whatever you command, but we have no ability nor experience at such things. We beg you, therefore, for forgiveness."

But the king was furious and ordered the guard to put them all out of the way. Then he began to beat his brow and tear his hair and mourn for Aesop. And as he moaned he said, "In my stupidity I have destroyed the pillar of my kingdom." And he would take neither food nor drink.

(107) When the captain of the guard saw the king's misery, he decided to disclose his misconduct immediately and said, "Sire, I know that today is my last day."

Lycurgus said to him, "What did you say?"

He replied, "In disobeying the king's order I have laid up trouble for myself."

The king said, "What do you have on your conscience?"

He said, "Aesop is alive."

The king was overjoyed at this unexpected news and said to Hermippus, "I only wish I could make this last day you talk about an eternity for you if you're telling the truth about Aesop's being alive, for if you've kept him safe, you've been the guardian of my salvation. But I'll not let you go unrewarded; I'll proclaim you my savior." And he ordered Aesop brought before him. When he appeared all filthy, unshaven, and pallid from his long imprisonment, the king turned away and wept. Then the king ordered him to be cared for and clothed and brought to receive his embrace.

(108) When Aesop was himself again, he came and embraced the king. He explained how his adopted son had laid a false accusation against him, and he took an oath to the truth of his account. The king wanted to kill Helios for having dealt treacherously with his father, but Aesop dissuaded him, arguing that if he were dead, he would have death as a cloak for the disgrace of his life, but so long as he lived, he would be a monument of his own guilt. The king consented to let him live but said to Aesop, "Take this letter from the king of the Egyptians and read it."

He read the requirement and said with a smile, "Answer him this way: 'I will send you men to build your tower and answer your questions when the winter is over.' " The king wrote as he directed and sent the letter by his ambassadors to Egypt. He restored Aesop to his original position of responsibility and turned Helios over to him.

He took the young man and lectured him. And this was what he said, (109) "Helios, my son, listen to my words even though you were brought up on them and yet repaid me with a gratitude I did not deserve. But now keep these precepts as a trust. First, reverence God as is right. Honor your king, for his power deserves the same honor as that of God. Honor your professor as your parents, for you are naturally obliged to treat them well, but you should be doubly grateful to him whose affection is freely bestowed. Take good food for the day as well as you can so that you may be ready for the work of the next day and keep your health. At the king's court let whatever you hear perish within you so that you may not quickly perish yourself. Let your relations with your wife be worthy so that she may not wish to have experience of another man, for womankind is a vain thing and less likely to go astray when flattered. When in your cups do not discuss serious matters to show off your learning, for you will be tripped up in an off moment and get yourself laughed at. Keep ahead of your tongue. Do not envy those who are successful, but rejoice with them, and you will share in their good fortune, for he who is jealous unwittingly harms himself. Take care of your slaves, and share what you have with them so that they may not only obey you as their master but also honor you as their benefactor. Rule your passions. If you learn a thing later than you should, do not be ashamed, for it is better to be called a late learner than a dolt. Keep your councils from your wife, and reveal no secrets to her, for womankind is a rival in married life, and she will sit all day plotting and scheming how to get you under her control. (110) Strive to put away something for tomorrow from what you get today, for it is better to leave something behind for your enemies than to go begging of your friends while you live. Be affable and courteous to those you meet, knowing that a dog's tail gets him food and his mouth, beatings. Be proud of your character and not of your wealth, for chance may rob you of the latter, but the former cannot be taken away. If you prosper, bear no grudge toward your enemies; rather treat them well so that they may have a change of heart when they realize what kind of a man they have wronged. If you are able to be charitable, do not hesitate, but give with a will, knowing that fortune does not tarry. If you find a man to be a gossip and a slanderer, cast him out in time even though he be your brother, for he does not behave so out of good will but rather in order to reveal to others what you say and do. Rejoice not at great wealth, and grieve not at small." When he had said these things to the young man, he left him. But Helios, grieving at the wrong he had done him and at being tongue-lashed by him, ended his life by refusing food. And Aesop mourned him and gave him a splendid funeral.

(111) After the funeral he called some fowlers and ordered them to catch four eagles. When the eagles were caught, he pulled out the last row of wing feathers, with which they are supposed to fly, and gave orders for them to be brought up and taught to carry boys. When they were full-grown, they would carry the boys, and with this burden they would fly up into the air with cords attached to them so that they were under the boys' control and would go wherever the boys wished. When summer came, he said goodbye to the king and set sail with his boys and his eagles, accompanied by many servants and much equipment calculated to impress the Egyptians.

(112) When he came to Memphis, it was announced to king Nectanabo that Aesop had arrived. Displeased at this news, he summoned his friends and said, "Men, I have been trapped by the news of Aesop's death. I have challenged Lycurgus by letter." So saying, he gave orders

for Aesop to debark. The next day Aesop came and presented his respects to the king. Nectanabo ordered his generals and governors to put on white robes, he himself put on a pure white linen robe and horns on his head. As he sat thus on his throne, he ordered Aesop to enter.

[(113) As he entered and saw this regalia, he made obeisance. Nectanabo said to him, "What likeness do you see in me and my attendants?"

Aesop said, "I would liken you to the moon in its fullness and those about you to the stars, for as the moon surpasses the other stars so you too have the appearance of the moon in this horned guise and your officials that of the stars about it." When Nectanabo heard this, he was amazed and gave him gifts.

(114) The next day Nectanabo dressed in shining purple, took his place, carrying many flowers, amid his courtiers and ordered Aesop to enter. When he came in, the king questioned him, saying, "What likeness do you see in me and my attendants?"

Aesop said, "I would liken you to the sun in springtime and those about you to the fruits of the earth, for like a king you delight the eye with your purple splendor, and you gather to yourself the flowering fruits." Again the king was amazed at his intellect and gave him gifts.]

(115) The next day Nectanabo dressed in white, clothed his friends in scarlet robes, and mounted his throne. When Aesop came, he asked him, "What do I resemble?"

Aesop said, "You are like the sun and those about you like its rays, for as the sun is bright and undefiled, so you too present yourself pure to men who wish to behold you and are brilliant as the sun, and these are flaming red like the rays of the sun."

The king was amazed and said to him, "So long as my kingdom continues thus, it follows that Lycurgus is nothing."

Aesop smiled and said, "Don't take his name recklessly in vain, for Lycurgus is as far above you as Zeus is above things of the earth. Zeus makes the sun and the moon to shine and to keep the seasons in order. If it pleases him to be angered, he makes his own shrine to tremble, causing terrifying thunder and dread lightning and setting earthquakes in motion. Just so, Lycurgus by the brilliance of his kingdom makes your brilliance dim and obscure, for he humbles everyone with his preëminence."

(116) Nectanabo, observing his sagacity and the readiness of his tongue, said to him, "Have you brought me men to build my tower?"

Aesop said, "They are ready when you point out the place."

The king in wonderment went outside the city with Aesop and gave the measurements for the building. Aesop stationed the eagles at the corners of the assigned space and ordered the boys to mount and fly up into the air. When they got aloft, they shouted, "Give us the mud and bricks and wood and whatever is required for the building."

Nectanabo: "Where did you trump up these winged men?"

Aesop said, "Oh, Lycurgus has winged men. And do you, who are only a man, want to match yourself against a king who is on a footing with the gods?"

Nectanabo said, "Aesop, I have lost. But answer me one question."

Aesop said, "Speak up; whatever you like."

(117) Nectanabo said, "I imported brood mares from Greece, and when they hear the horses in Babylon neighing, they miscarry."

Aesop said, "I'll give you my answer on this tomorrow." Then Aesop went to his quarters and ordered his men to catch a cat alive. [They caught him a great big one and began to whip it in public.] When the Egyptians saw this, they ran to Aesop's house and raised a shout against him. Aesop then ordered the cat released. But the Egyptians went to the king with their outcry against Aesop. The king summoned Aesop and, when he arrived, said to him, "You've done a bad thing. The animal is a symbol of the sacred goddess of Bubastis, and the Egyptians show it reverence."

(118) Aesop said, "Yes, but Lycurgus was wronged by it this night. He had a young rooster, a fighting cock—what's more, it told him the time—and the cat killed it tonight."

Nectanabo said to Aesop, "Aren't you ashamed of such a barefaced lie? How could a cat get from Egypt to Babylon in one night?"

Aesop said, "How can your mares here hear the horses at home and miscarry?"

The king, seeing his wit, began to be afraid that he would be bested and have to pay tribute to King Lycurgus.

(119) He immediately summoned prophets from Heliopolis who had knowledge of the questions of natural philosophy. When they had discussed Aesop with him, he invited them to dinner along with Aesop. They arrived at the appointed hour and took their places for dinner. One of the Heliopolitans said to Aesop, "We are sent by god to propose to you certain statements for your interpretation."

Aesop said, "You give the lie to yourselves and your god, for if he is a god he ought to know the thought of each and every man. But say on as you like."

(120) They said, "There is a temple and in it one column, and atop the column are twelve cities, and each of these is roofed with thirty beams, and about each of them run two women."

Aesop said, "Among us, children solve this conundrum. The temple is the universe, for it embraces all things; the column is the year, for it stands firm; the cities upon it are the twelve months, for they are continuously populated; the thirty beams are the thirty days of the month which embrace the year; and the two women moving around are night and day, for one follows the other." With this they arose from the dinner.

(121) The next day King Nectanabo held a council with his close

associates and said, "As I can see, because of this ill-favored and accursed fellow, I am going to have to send tribute to King Lycurgus."

But one of his friends said, "Let's pose him a problem in these words: 'What is there which we have neither seen nor heard?' and no matter what clever answer he gives, we'll tell him we've heard it and seen it. He'll be stopped by this and admit defeat."

When the king heard this, he was overjoyed, thinking he had found a way to win. When Aesop presented himself, King Nectanabo said to him, "Answer us this one more question, and I will pay the tribute to Lycurgus. Tell us something we have never either seen or heard."

Aesop said, "Give me three days, and I will give you your answer." He left the king and reasoned with himself, "They will say they have seen whatever I mention." (122) But Aesop, ever resourceful in such affairs, sat down and drafted himself a note of a loan in this form: "Lent to Nectanabo by Lycurgus, a thousand talents of gold." And he inserted an indication of the time that had passed since the loan. Then, after three days, Aesop went to Nectanabo and found him with his friends, expecting him to be at a loss. But Aesop brought out the note and said, "Read this agreement."

King Nectanabo's friends lied and said, "We've seen this and heard of it many times."

Aesop said, "I'm glad you authenticate it. Let him pay the money on the spot, for the due date is past."

King Nectanabo said, "How can you be witnesses to a debt I don't owe?"

They said, "We've never seen or heard of it."

Aesop said, "If that's your answer, the problem is solved."

(123) Nectanabo said, "Lycurgus is truly fortunate to have such wisdom in his kingdom." He gave Aesop the tribute for three years and sent him back with a peaceful letter. When Aesop arrived in Babylon, he told Lycurgus all that had happened in Egypt and gave him the money. Lycurgus then ordered the erection of a golden statue of Aesop with the Muses, and he held a great celebration in honor of Aesop's wisdom.

(124) But Aesop wished to go to Delphi, and so he said goodbye to the king, swearing to return and spend the rest of his life in Babylon. He went to other cities and gave demonstrations of his wisdom and learning. And when he came to Delphi, he undertook to give an exhibition there, too, and the people enjoyed hearing him at first but gave him nothing. Seeing that the men were as pale as potherbs, Aesop said to them,

> Even as the leaves of the trees such is the race of men.*

(125) Still jibing at them he said, "Men of Delphi, you are like a piece of driftwood floating on the sea; when we see it at a great distance, toss-

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*Iliad VI, 146.

ing on the waves, we think it is something worthwhile, but then when we approach and come to it, we find that it is a very insignificant thing of no value. So it has been with me; when I was far away from your city, I was impressed with you as men of wealth and generosity, but now that I see you are inferior to other men in your breeding and in your city, I recognize that I was mistaken. I shall carry away a bad impression of you, for I see that you act in no way unworthy of your ancestors."

(126) When the Delphians heard this, they said to him, "And who are our ancestors?"

Aesop said, "Slaves, and if you don't know this, let me tell you about it. Long ago it was the custom among the Greeks when they captured a city to send a tenth of the spoils to Apollo. For example, out of a hundred oxen they would send ten, and the same with goats and everything else—with money, with men, with women. You, being born of them as slaves, are like men in bondage, for by your birth you are marked as slaves of all the Greeks." So saying, he made preparation for his departure.

(127) But the officials, seeing how abusive he was, reasoned to themselves, "If we let him go away, he'll go around to other cities and damage our reputation." So they plotted to kill him by a trick. With the connivance of Apollo, who was angry with Aesop because of the insult on Samos in not setting him up along with the Muses, the Delphians, not waiting for a reasonable pretext, devised a villainous scheme so that the other visitors could not help him. They kept a watch on the slave at his door, and when they caught him asleep, they did their work. They brought a golden cup from the temple and hid it in his baggage. Unaware of what had been done, Aesop set off for Phocis.

(128) Some Delphians overtook him, tied him up, and dragged him back to the city. When he demanded in a loud voice, "Why are you taking me prisoner?" they replied, "You have stolen treasures from the temple."

Aesop, whose conscience was clear, said with tears in his eyes, "I am ready to die if I am found guilty of such a thing."

The Delphians ransacked his baggage and found the cup. They showed it off to the city and loudly and violently made a spectacle of him. Aesop reasoned that it must have been hidden there as part of a plot and asked the Delphians about it, but they wouldn't listen to him. He said, "Mortals that you are, be not wiser than the gods." But they locked him up in the prison to hold him for punishment. Finding no means of saving himself, Aesop said, "Now how can I, a mortal man, escape what is to be?"

(129) A friend of his came and with the permission of the guards went in to him. With tears in his eyes the friend said, "What have we come to?"

And Aesop told him a fable. "A woman who had buried her husband was sitting beside his tomb and weeping uncontrollably. A man who was plowing saw her and conceived a desire for her. He left his oxen standing with the plow and went over to her, pretending to weep himself. She paused and asked him: 'Why are you weeping?'

"The plowman said: 'I have buried a good and wise wife, and when I weep I find it lightens my grief.'

"She said: 'I, too, have lost a good husband, and when I do as you do, I lighten the burden of my grief.'

"He said to her: 'Well now, since we have both suffered the same fate and fortune, why don't we get to know one another? I'll love you as I did her, and you shall love me as you did your husband.' With this he persuaded the woman. But while he took his pleasure of her, someone drove off his oxen. When the plowman returned and didn't find his oxen, he began to weep and shout in earnest. The woman said: 'What are you wailing about?'

"The plowman said: 'Woman, now *I've* got something to mourn.'

"And you ask me why I'm grieving when you can see the pass fortune has brought me to?"

(130) The friend sorrowfully said to him, "Why in the world did you have to insult them in their own land and city, and do it when you were at their mercy? Where was your training? Where was your learning? You have given advice to cities and peoples, but you have turned out witless in your own cause."

But Aesop offered him another fable. (131) "A woman had a simple-minded daughter. She prayed to all the gods to give her daughter some sense, and the daughter often heard her praying. Then once they went out to the country. The girl left her mother and went outside the farmyard, where she saw a man coupling with a mule. She said to the man: 'What are you doing?'

"He said: 'I'm putting some sense in her.'

"The simple girl remembered her mother's prayer and said: 'Put some in me.'

"In his state he refused, saying; 'Nothing is more thankless than a woman.'

"But she said: 'Oh, don't worry, sir, my mother will thank you and will pay you whatever you want. She prays for me to get some sense.'

"And so the man deflowered her. She was overjoyed and ran home to her mother and said: 'Mother, I have some sense.'

"And the mother said: 'How did you get sense, child?'

"The simple girl told her mother the story. 'A man put it in me with a long, sinewy, red thing that ran in and out.'

"When the mother heard her daughter tell this, she said: 'My child, you've lost what sense you had.'

"It's turned out the same way for me, my friend, for I've lost what sense I had in coming to Delphi."

After many tears, the friend left him.

(132) The Delphians came in to Aesop and said, "You are to be thrown from the cliff today, for this is the way they voted to put you to death as a temple thief and a blasphemer who does not deserve the dignity of a burial. Prepare yourself."

Seeing that they were threatening him, Aesop said, "Let me tell you a story." And they gave him leave to speak.

Aesop said, (133) "Once when the animals all spoke the same language, a mouse made friends with a frog and invited him to dinner. He took him into a very well-stocked storeroom where there was bread, meat, cheese, olives, figs. And he said: 'Eat.'

"When he had helped himself generously, the frog said: 'You must come to my house for dinner, too, and let me give you a good reception.' He took the mouse to his pool and said: 'Dive in.'

"But the mouse said: 'I don't know how to dive.'

"The frog said: 'I'll teach you.' And he tied the mouse's foot to his own with a string and jumped into the pool, pulling the mouse with him.

"As the mouse drowned he said: 'Even though I'm dead, I'll pay you off.' Just as he said this the frog dove under and drowned him. As the mouse lay floating on the water a water bird carried him off with the frog tied to him, and when he had finished eating the mouse, he got his claws into the frog. This is the way the mouse punished the frog. Just so, gentlemen, if I die, I will be your doom. The Lydians, the Babylonians, and practically the whole of Greece will reap the harvest of my death."

(134) When he had said this and the Delphians still paid him no heed but were taking him off to the cliff, Aesop took refuge in the shrine of the Muses. Even so they showed him no mercy, but as he was being dragged off against his will, he said, "Men of Delphi, do not scorn this shrine. (135) It was just so that the rabbit, who was being chased by the eagle, took refuge with the tumblebug and begged the bug to save him. The tumblebug pleaded with the eagle not to disregard his request, adjuring him by Zeus not to despise his smallness. But the eagle brushed the tumblebug aside with his wing, carried off the rabbit, tore him to bits, and ate him.

(136) "The tumblebug was infuriated and flew off after the eagle. It spied out the nest where the eagle had its clutch of eggs and came back and smashed them. When the eagle returned, he was very much wrought up and started to find out who was responsible for this to tear him limb from limb. When the season came around, the eagle laid an egg in a higher place. The tumblebug came back, repeated his performance, and was gone. The eagle mourned its children, saying that this was the wrath of Zeus, sent to make the race of eagles even rarer.

(137) "When the time came around again, the eagle was so unhappy it didn't keep its eggs in its nest any more but went up to Olympus and deposited its eggs on the lap of Zeus and said: 'Twice my eggs have disappeared; the third time I'm leaving them with you to have you protect them.'

"But the tumblebug found this out, loaded himself up with manure, and went up to Zeus. He flew past Zeus' face, and Zeus was so startled to see the filthy thing that he jumped up. Forgetting that he had the eggs in his lap, he smashed them.

(138) "After this Zeus learned that the tumblebug had been wronged, and when the eagle returned, he said: 'You deserved to lose your children for the wrong you did the tumblebug.'

"The tumblebug said: 'He not only wronged me, but he was very impious toward you, for although I adjured him in your name, he had no fear but killed my suppliant. I shall never stop until I have punished him to the fullest extent.'

(139) "Since Zeus did not want the breed of eagles to die out, he tried to persuade the tumblebug to be reconciled. When the tumblebug would not hear of this, he changed the nesting season for the eagle to a time when the tumblebug is not to be seen on earth.

"So, do not, men of Delphi, dishonor this shrine where I have taken refuge, even though the temple is small, but remember the tumblebug and reverence Zeus, the god of strangers and Olympus."

(140) The Delphians were not deterred but took him off and stood him on the cliff. When he saw the fate that was prepared for him, he said, "Since I've used all kinds of arguments without persuading you, let me tell you this story. A farmer who had grown old in the country and had never seen the city begged his children to let him go and see the city before he died. They hitched the donkeys to the wagon themselves and told him: 'Just drive them, and they'll take you to the city.'

"On the way a storm came up, it got dark, the donkeys lost their way and came to a place surrounded by cliffs. Seeing the danger he was in, he said: 'Oh Zeus, what wrong have I done that I should die this way, without even horses, but only these miserable donkeys, to blame it on?' So it is that I am annoyed to die not at the hands of reputable men but of miserable slaves."

(141) As he was on the point of being thrown over the cliff, he told still another fable. ["A man fell in love with his own daughter, and suffering from this wound, he sent his wife off to the country and forced himself upon his daughter. She said: 'Father, this is an unholy thing you are doing. I would rather have submitted to a hundred men than to you.' This is the way I feel toward you, men of Delphi. I would rather drag my way through Syria, Phoenicia, and Judaea than die at your hands here, where one would least expect it."] But they did not change their minds.

(142) Aesop cursed them, called on the leader of the Muses to witness that his death was unjust, and threw himself over the cliff. And so he ended his life.

When the Delphians were afflicted with a famine, they received an oracle from Zeus that they should expiate the death of Aesop. Later, when word reached them, the peoples of Greece, Babylon, and Samos avenged Aesop's death.